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Gods and Heroes

and

MYTHS FROM OVID

also

Sonnets and Legends

By

J. Brookes More



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Gods and Heroes

To

My Three Brothers

E. Anson More,

Paul Elmer More,

Louis T. More,

who have witnessed its growth , this book
is dedicated.

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Gods and Heroes

Now to the world comes one in earnest song,
With stylus saddened, dipped in blood and tears,
Shed by those heroes of forgotten years,
Now veiled in glooms, a silent shadow-throng.--

Their deeds of glory tarnished in the long
Sweep of dark ages, lo, the sad world nears
Deeper eclipse—fleet-footed Future bears
From shadow-voids, to whelm the great and
strong.

Alas, the doomed world may dissolve in space,
But never should the truth of love be lost,
Nor elemental passion be forgot.

Oh let my spirit fabled paths retrace,
And recreate that dim etherial host,
In forms immortal, that they perish not.

Orpheus and Eurydice

An Elegy

Eurydice, the daughter of Nereus, was the beloved and virtuous wife of Orpheus, the melodious God of Music; but at the termination of the Golden Age, sin wrought for evil, and Eurydice, while flying from the wicked Aristæus was bitten on the heel by a serpent and died from the venom. Orpheus descended to the Regions of Death and besought Pluto for her return to life. His prayer was granted under condition he should not look back while bearing her from the abode of gloom. For love of her he turned to gaze upon her beautiful countenance, and she vanished; and he hath ever since wandered upon the face of the earth.

Dreaming upon a bed of fragrant flowers,

Reclined a maiden in the pleasant noon,

As if to pass away the drowsy hours

In thoughtless memories and wakeful swoon.

Afar she heard the sound of tinkling rills,
The ever-singing birds, that must rejoice
In life, and far away among the hills
The faintest echoes of an unknown voice.

She listened to the softly swelling strains
Of liquid notes that ever nearer drew;
Delightful rhapsodies that o'er the plains
Were wafted by each friendly breeze that blew.

But still she lay upon her lovely bed,
While her bright fancies as the fays and elves,
Built palaces of moonstone, diamonded,
Gleaming as caves the astonished miner delves.

And ever as she dreamed those phantasies,
She strained to catch the accent of each word,
Wafted in song upon the gentle breeze,
Which, faintly first, at length she plainly heard:

Orpheus and Eurydice

“Fair blow the lilies,
In a bending spray,
Sprinkling musk dew-drops
On the honied bee;—
Sweeter my dear love,
Oh, sweeter than they,
Love in thy fond eyes,
Dear Eurydice.”

Vanished the dream, the song has ceased; and now
A sigh escapes her rich half-parted lips;
And sorrow almost marks her smooth white brow
As from her mind the cherished vision slips.

The song is hushed; her faery dream is gone;
She turns and opes her azure-lidded eyes;—
And Orpheus, King of Music, all alone,
Leans o'er her as his song in murmur dies.

Gods and Heroes

As dew in lily chalice, into her dream

He melts. And ah! what hopes and vows have they
Mid sighs to tell; while far the red sun's beam
Glints o'er the sky with slant and gilded ray.

Delightful moments! happy hours! ah fold

Thy tireless pinions lone and loveless Time!
Let not the twilight of this day grow old,
This day when love makes bright the world's fair prime.

The day is gone and night succeedeth night,

And they are all unconscious of the hours;
So happy their felicitous delight,
So sweet to pluck love's constant springing flowers.

And ah, to roam together that fair land,

While Orpheus breathes on his unequal reeds,
Or chants a rondo by some moon-lit strand,
Love-taught, heart-sweet, and that his dear love needs.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Thus when the virgin earth was beautiful,
 These lovers in that world of Paradise,
That region lovelier than the Land of Gul,
 So fondly loved beneath the starry skies.

'Twas in the Golden Age, and all the earth
 Was joyous,— beautiful with hope and truth;
The verdant valleys knew nor flood nor dearth,
 And Time, that now is old, was in his youth.

The earth was radiant in that glorious prime;
 The moon, the stars shone brighter in the stream:
The Golden Age—alas, that hallowed time
 Has passed away as some melodious dream.

And where are they? ah, let the fountains tell
 Where they have wandered since that peaceful age;
Or ask the winds, or hearken to the shell
 That murmurs when old Nereus calms his rage.

Or ask thy soul and know the mournful truth,
 Sadly she perished with the sin of man:
A lovely flower she blossomed in her youth
 To fade away when sorrow's reign began.

'Tis ever thus the beautiful is marred—
 Sorrow from joy; trouble from gentle sleep!
Over the wide sky, bright with glory, starred,
 The ravening clouds rush upward from the deep.

What star-eyed lily ever routed Night,
 Or stole a tick of time from Nature's sheaf?
What valiant rosebud ever vanquished blight,
 Or crushed the canker from its crumpled leaf?

While Orpheus piped upon his oaten reeds
 Sweet ditties tuneful birds might imitate,
Eurydice, providing simple needs,
 Hunted wild honey and fruits delicate.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Lo! Aristæus, hidden in the brush,
Beheld her beauty as she chanced to pass,
And, rising to her view, with brutal rush
Ran lustful after. Through the yielding grass

She fled in terror, backward to the place
Where Orpheus waited in their wonted nook;
Fear urged her that she should have won the race,
But, hissing in her path, a serpent struck

Deep in her tender heel his venom'd fangs.—
Alas, first victim of the serpent's rage,
Martyr of Sin and sad Death's bitter pangs,
Her beauty welted with the Golden Age.

Since then the sad world knoweth not her reign;
Whate'er is deemed most exquisite is marred;
The serpent's trail has left a taint, a stain,—
And all the face of earth is seared and scarred.—

Far through the night to Pluto's gloomy halls,
Grim-shadowed, labyrinthed in noxious haze,
Her stricken spirit like a lily falls,
Deprived of Orpheus' last love-lingering gaze.

Wafted by Charon over Stygian tide,
Her radiant beauty veiled in hideous glooms,
She, lost to love and light must there abide,
A tender lamb devoured by night-wolf dooms.

Far from the hallowed sphere of life and light,
Where, innocent, she roamed flower-spangled vales,
Now deeply prisoned in unpiteous night
She wanders barrens parched with torrid gales.

Alas, while her sad shadow flits below,
Glad Orpheus pipeth ditties on his reeds,
As long his custom when his love would go
To gather dainties for their daily needs.

Orpheus and Eurydice

But when the hour for her return was sped,
And he beheld the sun's declining rays,
Deprived of her sweet presence; lo! instead
Of her dear self a vision in a haze

Obscure and ghastly, gathered in that bower;
And filled with horror he beheld her form,—
(Imaged in pale mist like a snow-white flower)
Languished to death by fangs of jealous worm.

Startled from musing rhapsodies he rose
To seek his love through wilds and hidden glens;
But still that vision guides him as he goes,
Fearful in haste, through labyrinthic dens.

Almost the moon hath flushed the silvered east,
Almost the sun hath burnished the gold west,
When gathering in a circle that gray mist
Hovers above his lone and lovely quest.

And when he views that child of beauty spent,
With no sweet spirit in her lifeless clay,
His grief confounding him, with wild lament
He halts the night and holds the flight of day.

“Spread wide your portals, O disastrous Death!
Immortal I am coming to abide
Forever with your victims, void of breath,
Or ravish your dominion of my bride.

“Give up your denizens of midnight woe,
Immured in Misery’s discordant wrong!
From light eternal to the gloom below
I challenge discord with harmonic song.”

Majestic with the power that music gives,
His challenge rings upon the gates of death;
Swart Death a moment harbors him who lives,
Breathing his woe to those who have not breath.—

Orpheus and Eurydice

“O Pluto, Lord of Shadows and Lost Souls!

What glory is it for these wretched wells,
Deep in the void whence Night her chariot rolls,
To 'mure the light of sweet Arcadian dells?

“Is this the dark fate virtue may expect,

The pure destroyed to ease the spleen of Sin;
What final good can evil deed effect;
Must virtue lose that wickedness may win?

“O Pluto, Lord of human destiny,

What deed of lustful sin must this requite,
To blot my beautiful Eurydice,
Star of my life, in this opaque night?

“Release that Child of Beauty, oh grim Death!

Life, light and love should never gild a tomb;
Her place is where the pure breeze wandereth,
Loving the rose to lovelier blush and bloom.

“Strong in the frailty of harmonic laws,
I come to quell the wrath of death and strife;
My love release!—love’s pure and primal cause,—
That I may bear her to the land of life.”

So sings he God-like to his tuneful lyre,
While stops the torture of Ixion’s wheel,
While Tantalus forgets tormenting fire,
And the fierce Furies piteous languor feel.

And all the clangor of wide Hades hushed,
The sad-eyed shadows flutter as the leaves
When wreathed Spring, with tender buds new-flushed,
In floating green the amorous Wind receives.

And in an ecstasy of quivering sighs
Dark dungeons tremble, stricken with delight;
The rock-ribbed pit that death and time defies
Glows with a joy too luminous for night.

Orpheus and Eurydice

The deep foundations of that vale of woe
Sway to the rhythm of one soul's complaint;
Grim Pluto shudders lest that mortal foe
May shatter his strict portals of restraint.

Hatred destroyed lies vanquished by pure love;
Discord disabled, harmony has quelled;
Pluto in panic, dazzled from above,
Seeks to restore sweet life, obdurate held.

Wrung from his might that Lord of Woe replied,
"Brief is the boon of blessed life above,
No mortal may recross the Stygian tide,
But this I grant to thee and to thy love;

"Return with her in thy protecting arms,
And rise together to the sun-lit skies;
But if thy glance should turn to view her charms,
Again to death she'll vanish from thine eyes."

Alas, the sentence that should give them fear
Fills them with courage, joy, and blessed hope;
Wreathing in ready arms that burden dear
Orpheus ascendeth to the sun-lit cope.

While they are rising from that haunt of gloom,
She sighs his name in tones of former days,
Which when he hears, forgetting her sad doom,
He turns to worship her with lover's gaze.

O, sad conclusion of undaunted quest,
His lovely mate restored by Pluto's grant,
Only because his love confused his breast
Again destroyed that shadow-realm must haunt.

No more for him the adamantine gates
Swing inward to that region of bleak woe;
No more for her, twice-dead of jealous fate,
Those silent gates give exit from below.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Never again can Orpheus thread the gloom,
And wake those hollows with his raptured notes;
To wander on the earth is now his doom,
Love-lorn in valleys where the ring-dove dotes.

The wearied centuries have withered away
The essence of his youth and left him old—
He seems a shadow in the noon of day,
A wraith of pale mist when the moon is cold.

Weary of heart the Golden Age he mourns,
In winter winds attuned to minor keys;
And when the gladdened earth warm spring adorns
The birds rehearse his plaintive melodies.—

And who is he whose song is sad and sweet?
And who is he that sings a mournful song?
And who is he with slow but viewless feet,
That treads the swaying asphodels among?

It is a spirit that pervades the wild,
The singing birds that gives to life and breath;
The King of Music, weeping that sweet child,—
Eurydice, alas, destroyed by death.—

A plaintive song doth he to Nature tell;
And thou mayst hear it by the far sea-shore;
And thou mayst hear it in the leafy dell,
By wind and wave repeated o'er and o'er.

For every gale that wafts from lonely isle,
Loves to repeat the sad and plaintive notes;
And thou mayst hear it, if thou wilt, the while
This monody upon the still night floats:—

“I'll hang my harp upon the willows high,
The willows in a silent wilderness,
Where every sweetest breeze that sweepeth by,
May touch it softly with a fond caress.

Orpheus and Eurydice

“Where every careless wind from grove and wild,
May wake to life Love’s song, seraphic, lost
When my love died; ah, fair and lovely child,
Too frail to live in vessel tempest-tossed.

“How fond I loved her when the earth was new!
Before the day when Slaughter marked his own,
When all the universe was pure and true,
When only life and love and hope were known!—

“Alas, a discord jangles now the string,
Alas, a palsey quavers now the note;
Fain would I life forego and mount on wing
To the stars, bland, sweet-hymning as they float.”

DAPHNE and PHŒBUS

Daphne and Phœbus

Daphne, the daughter of the River-God
Peneus, first was loved by Phœbus, God
Of glorious light. 'Twas not a cause of chance,
But out of Cupid's vengeful spite that she
Was fated to torment the Lord of light.
For, Phœbus, proud of Python's death, beheld
That impish God of Love upon a time
When he was bending his diminished bow;
And voicing his contempt in anger said;

“What, wanton boy, are mighty arms to thee,
Great weapons suited to the needs of war?
The bow is only for the use of those
Large Deities of Heaven whose strength may deal

Wounds, mortal, to the savage beasts of prey;
And who courageous, overcome their foes.—
It is a weapon proper to the use
Of such as slew with arrows Python, huge,
Whose pestilential carcase vast extent
Covered. Content thee with the flames thy torch
Enkindles (fires too subtle for my thought)
And leave to me the glory that is mine.”

To him, undaunted, Venus’ son replied;
“O Phœbus, thou canst conquer all the world
With thy strong bow and arrows, but with this
Small arrow I shall pierce thy vaunting breast!
And by the measure that thy might exceeds
The broken powers of thy defeated foes,
So is thy glory less than mine.” No more
He spake, but with his wings expanded, thence
Flew lightly to Parnassus’ lofty peak.—
There, from his quiver he plucked arrows twain,
Most curiously wrought of different art,

One love exciting, one repelling love.—
The dart of love was glittering, gold and sharp,
The other was a blunted shaft of lead;
And with that dull lead dart he shot the Nymph;
But with the keen point of the golden dart
He pierced the Sun-God's marrow to the bone.

Immediately the one with love was filled,
The other, scouting at the thought of love,
Rejoiced in the deep shadow of the woods.
And, as the virgin Phœbe (who denies
The joys of love and loves the joys of chase)
A maiden's fillet bound her flowing hair,—
And her pure mind denied the love of man.
Beloved and wooed she wandered silent paths,
For never could her modesty endure
The glance of man or listen to his love.

Her grieving father spoke to her, "Alas,
My daughter, I have wished a son-in-law,

For thou dost owe a grandchild to the joy
Of my old age." But Daphne only hung
Her head to hide her shame. The nuptial torch
Seemed criminal to her. She even clung,
Caressing, with her arms around his neck,
And pled, "My dearest father, let me live
A virgin always, for remember thou
Didst give me to Diana at my birth."

But though her father promised her desire,
Her loveliness prevailed against her will;
For, Phœbus when he saw her waxed distraught,
And filled with wonder, his sick fancy raised
Delusive hopes; and his own oracles
Deceived him.— As the stubble in the field
Flares up, or as the stacked wheat is consumed
By flames, enkindled from a spark or torch
The chance pedestrian may neglect at dawn;
So was the bosom of the God consumed,
And so desire flamed in his stricken heart.

He saw her bright hair waving on her neck;—
“How beautiful if properly arranged!”
He saw her eyes like stars of sparkling fire;
Her lips for kissing sweetest, and her hands,
And fingers and her arms; her shoulders white
As ivory. And whatever was not seen
More beautiful must be.

Swift as the wind
From his pursuing feet the virgin fled,
And neither stopped nor heeded as he called;
“O Nymph! O Daphne! I entreat thee stay,
It is no enemy that follows thee—
Why, so the lamb flies from the raging wolf,
And from the lion runs the timid fawn,
And from the eagle flies the trembling dove,
All hastening from their natural enemy—
But I alone pursue for my dear love.—
Alas, if thou shouldst fall and mar thy face,
Or tear upon the bramble thy soft thighs,

Or should I prove unwilling cause of pain!

“The pathway of thy flight is rough with thorns,
And I beseech thee slacken thy swift pace,
And I will slowly follow. Ask of me
And thou shalt learn that no rude churl am I
Compelled to watch the flock in rustic guise:
And neither canst thou know from whom thy feet
Fly fearful, or thou wouldst not leave me thus.

“The Delphic Land, the Pataræan Realm,
Clarus and Tenedus revere my name,
And my immortal sire is Jupiter.
The present, past and future are through me,
In sacred oracles, revealed to man;
And from my harp the harmonies of sound
Are borrowed by their bards to praise the Gods.
The swift dart driven by my bow is sure,
But keener in its aim a barb has pierced
My burning breast and rankles in my heart.—
Is not the hallowed art of medicine

My proper field and mine the power of herbs?
But though the world declares my useful works,
There is no herb to medicate my wound,
And all the arts that save have failed their lord."

But even as he made his plaint, the Nymph
With timid footsteps fled from his approach,
And left him to his murmurs and his pain.

Lovely the virgin seemed as the soft wind
Exposed her limbs, and as the zephyrs fond
Fluttered amid her garments, and the breeze
Fanned lightly in her flowing hair. She seemed
Most lovely to his fancy in her flight;
And mad with love, he followed in her steps,
And silently hastened his increasing speed.

As when the greyhound sees the frightened hare
Flit o'er the plain:—With eager nose outstretched,
Impetuous, he rushes on his prey,
And gains upon her till he treads her feet,

And almost fastens in her side his fangs;—
But she, whilst dreading that her end is near,
Is suddenly delivered from her fright;
So was it with the God and Nymph. While one
With hope pursued, the other fled in fear;
And he who followed, borne on wings of love,
Permitted her no rest and gained on her,
Until his warm breath mingled in her hair.

Her strength spent, pale and faint, with
pleading eyes
She gazed upon her father's waves and prayed,
“Help me my father, if thy flowing streams
Have virtue! Cover me, O mother Earth!
Destroy the beauty that has injured me,
And change my form inciting only woe.”

Before her prayer was ended, torpor seized
On all her body, and a thin bark closed
Around her gentle bosom, and her hair

Became as moving leaves; her arms were changed
To waving branches, and her active feet,
As clinging roots, were fastened to the ground.

Phœbus admired and loved the graceful tree,
(For still, though changed, her slender form remained)
And with his right hand lingering on the trunk
He felt her bosom throbbing in the bark.
He clung to trunk and branch as though to twine
His form with hers, and fondly kissed the wood
That shrank from every kiss.

And thus the God;
"Thou canst not be my Queen, but surely thou
Shalt be my tree, a laurel for my brow;
And thou shalt wreath my quiver and my lyre.—
When joyful voices raise triumphant songs,
Thou shalt precede the Roman generals,
And the brave legions to the Capitol:
And as a faithful guardian they shall hang

Thy wreath ed garlands of bright evergreen
To front the portals on Augustan posts,
There to protect the sacred middle oak.
And as my youthful brow retains its grace,
So, also, shalt thou ever bear thy leaves
Unchanging to thy glory.”

Here the God,
Phœbus, Apollo, ended his lament;
And unto him the Laurel bent her boughs,
So lately fashioned; and it seemed to him
Her graceful nod gave answer to his love.

PHAETON and PHŒBUS

Phaeton and Phœbus

Glowing with gold, flaming with carbuncles,
On stately columns raised, refulgent shone
The palace of the Sun, with polished dome
Of ivory gleaming, and with portals twain
Of burnished silver. And the workmanship
Exceeded all the wealth of gems and gold;
For there had Mulciber engraved the seas
Encircling middle earth; the globe of earth,
And heaven impending o'er the globe.

And there
Amid the waves were azure deities:
Melodious Triton and eleusive Proteus; there
Ægæan pressing with his arms the backs

Of monstrous whales; and Doris in the sea
And all her daughters; some amid the waves
And others sitting on the bank to dry
Their sea-green hair, and others borne about
By fishes. Each was made to show a fair
Resemblance to her sisters—yet not one
Appearance was assigned to all—they seemed
As near alike as sisters should in truth.
And men and cities, woods and savage beasts,
And streams and nymphs, and sylvan deities
Were carved upon the land; and over these
An image of the glittering sky was fixed;—
Six signs were on the right, six on the left.

Here when arrived audacious Phaeton,
By steep ascending paths, without delay
He entered in the shining palace-gates
Of his reputed parent, making haste
To stand in his paternal presence. There,
Unable to endure the dazzling light,

Phaeton and Phoebus

He waited at a distance.

Phœbus sat,
Arrayed in royal purple, on a throne
That glittered with the purest emeralds.—
There to the left and right, Day, Month and Year,
Time and the Hours, at equal distance stood;
And vernal Spring stood crowned with
wreath ed flowers;
And naked Summer stood with sheaves of wheat;
And Autumn stood besmeared with trodden grapes;
And icy Winter rough with hoary hair.

And from the midst, with orbs that view the world,
Phœbus beheld the trembling youth, o'ercome
In mute amazement, and he said; "Declare
The reason of thy journey. What wilt thou
In this my palace, Phaeton my child
Belov ed?"

And to him replied the youth;
"O, universal light of all the world,
My father Phœbus, if thy name be mine,

If Clymene has not concealed her sin
Beneath some pretext, give to me, my sire,
A token to declare thy fatherhood
Which may establish my assured descent,
And leave no dark suspicions in our minds.”—

Then Phœbus from his shining brows cast down
His circling rays; called Phaeton to him,
And as he held him to his breast replied;

“O child most worthy of thy sire, the truth
Was told thee by thy mother; wherefore doubts
To dissipate, consider thy desire,
And ask of me that I may freely give:
Yea, let the Nether Lake, beyond our view,
(Which is the oath of Gods inviolate)
Be witness to my word.”

When this was said
The happy youth at once began to plead
Command and guidance of his father's steeds,

Wing-footed, and his chariot for a day.

But Phoebus much repented that he sware,
And thrice and four times shook his radiant head;
“Ah, would I might refuse my plighted word;
And O, that it were lawful to deny
The promised boon.— For I confess, O son,
This only I should keep from thee— and yet
'Tis lawful to dissuade. It is unsafe
To satisfy thy will. It is a great
Request, O Phaeton, which neither suits
Thy utmost strength nor tender years; for thou
Art mortal, and thou hast aspired to things
Immortal. Ignorance has made thy thought
Transcend the province of the Gods. I vaunt
No vain exploits; but only I can stand
Securely on the flame-fraught axle-tree:
Even the Ruler of Olympus, vast,
Who hurls fierce lightnings with his great right hand,
May never dare to drive this chariot,

And what art thou to equal mighty Jove?

“The opening path is steep and difficult,
For scarcely can the steeds, refreshed at dawn,
Climb up the steeps: and when is reached the hight,
Extreme of midmost Heaven, and sea and earth
Are viewed below, my trembling breast is filled
With fearful apprehensions: and requires
The last precipitous descent a sure
Command. Then, also, Tethys, who receives
Me in her subject waves, is wont to fear
Lest I should fall disastrous. And around
The hastening sky revolves in constant whirl,
Drawing the lofty stars with rapid twist.

“I struggle on. The force that overcomes
The heavenly bodies overwhelms me not,
And I am borne against the rapid globe.
Suppose the chariot thine: what canst thou do?
Canst thou drive straight against the twisted pole
And not be carried from the lofty path

Phaeton and Phoebus

By the swift car? Art thou deceived to think
There may be groves and cities of the Gods,
And costly temples wondrously endowed?

“The journey is beset with dreadful snares
And shapes of savage animals. If thou
Shouldst hold upon thy way without mistake
Yet must thy journey be through Taurus’ horns,
And through the Bow Hæmonian, and the jaws
Of the fierce Lion, and the cruel arms
Of Scorpion, bent throughout a vast expanse,
And Cancer’s curving arms reversely bent.

“It is no easy task for thee to rule
The mettled four-foot steeds, enflamed in fires
That kindle in their breasts, forth issuing
In breathings from their mouths and nostrils hot;—
I scarce restrain them, as their struggling necks
Pull on the harness, when their heated fires
Are thus aroused.

“And, O my son, lest I
May be the author of a baneful gift,
Beware, and as the time permits recall
Thy rash request. Forsooth thou hast besought
Undoubted signs of thy descent from me?
My fears for thee are certain signs that thou
Art of my blood— by my paternal fears
'Tis manifest I am thy father. Lo!
Behold my countenance! and oh, that thou
Couldst even pierce my bosom with thine eyes,
And so discover my paternal cares.

“Look round thee on the treasured
world's delights
And ask the greatest blessing of the sky,
Or sea or land, and thou shalt suffer no
Repulse: but only this I must deplore
Which rightly named would be a penalty
And not an honor.— Thou hast made request
Of punishment and not a gift indeed.

Phaeton and Phoebus

O, witless boy! why dost thou hold my neck
With thy caressing arms? For, doubt it not,
As I have sworn it by the Stygian waves,
Whatever thou shalt wish, it shall be given.
But thou shouldst wish more wisely.”

So were all
His admonitions said, availing naught.
For Phaeton resisted his advice,
And urged again his claim, and eagerly burned
To use the chariot. Wherefore, Phœbus long
Delaying and reluctant, took the youth
To view the spacious chariot, gift of Vulcan.—
Gold was the axle and the beam was gold,
The great Wheel had a golden tire and spokes
Of silver; chrysolites and diamonds
Reflected from the spangled yoke the light
Of Phœbus.

Whilst aspiring Phaeton admired
The glittering chariot and its workmanship,

The vigilant Aurora opened forth
Her purple portals from the ruddy east,
Disclosing halls replete with roses. All
The stars took flight, whilst Lucifer, the last
To quit his vigil, gathered that great host
And disappeared from his celestial watch.

And when his father Phœbus saw the earth
And the wide universe in glowing tints
Arrayed, as waned the Moon's diminished horns,
Far-distant, then he bade the nimble Hours
To yoke the steeds.— At once the Deities
Accomplished his commands, and led the steeds,
Ambrosia-fed and snorting flames, from out
Their spacious stalls, fixing their sounding bits.

Then with a hallowed drug the father touched
The stripling's face, to make him proof against
The rapid flame, and wrought around his hair
The sun-rays. But, foreboding grief, he spake

Whilst many a sigh heaved from his anxious breast;
“If thou canst only heed thy father’s voice—
Be sparing of the whip and use with nerve
The reins; for of their own accord the steeds
Will hasten. Difficult are they to check
In full career. Thou must not drive the car
Directly through five circles, for the track
Takes a wide curve, obliquely, and is bound
By th’ extreme edge of three zones.— It avoids
The Southern Pole, and it avoids the Bear
That roams around the north. The way is plain:
The traces of the Wheel are manifest.

“Observe with care that both the earth and sky
Have their appropriate heat— Drive not too low,
Nor urge the chariot through the highest plane;
For if thy course attains too great a hight
Thou wilt consume the mansions of the sky,
And if too low the land will scorch with heat.—

“Take thou the middle plane, where all is safe;

Nor let the Wheel turn over to the right
And bear thee to the twisted Snake; nor let
It take thee to the Altar on the left—
So close to earth—but steer the middle course.—
To Fortune I commit thy fate, whose care
For thee so reckless of thyself I pray.

“Whilst I am speaking humid night has touched
The margin of Hesperian shores. 'Tis not
For us to idle; we are called away;—
When bright Aurora shines the darkness flies;
Take up the reins! But if thy stubborn breast
Be capable of change use not our car,
But heed our counsels whilst the time permits,
And whilst thy feet are on a solid base,
But not, according to thy foolish wish,
Pressing the axle. Rather let me light
The world beneath thy safe and wondering gaze.”

But Phaeton with youthful vigor leaped,
And in the light-made chariot lightly stood:

And he rejoiced, and with the reins in hand
Thanked his reluctant parent.

Instantly

Eo us, Æthon, Pyrois and Phlegon,
The winged horses of the Sun, gave vent
To flame-like neighs that filled the shaking air,
And pawed the barriers with their shining hoofs.
Then Tethys, witless of her grandson's fate
Let back the barriers,— and the universe
Was theirs to traverse. Taking the well-known road,
And moving through the air with winged feet,
They pierced resisting clouds, and spreading wide
Their pinions soared across the eastern wind,
Far-wafted from that realm. But Phaeton,
So easy to their yoke, lost all control,
And the great car was tossed,— as tapered ships
When lightened of their ballast toss and heave
Unsteady in the surging seas: the car
Leaped lightly in the air, and in the heights

Was tossed unsteady as an empty shell.

Soon as the steeds perceived it, with a rush
Impetuous, they left the beaten track;
Regardless of all order and control.
And Phaeton filled with fear, knew not to guide
With trusted reins, nor where the way might be—
Nor, if he knew, could he control their flight.

Warmed in the sunshine, never felt before,
The gelid Triones attempted vain
To bathe in seas forbid: the Serpent cold
And torpid by the frozen Pole, too cold
For contest, warmed, and rage assumed from heat:
Bootes, troubled by the heat, took flight,
Impeded by his wain.

And as from skies
Of utmost hight unhappy Phaeton
Beheld the earth receding from his view,
A pallor spread his cheeks with sudden fear;

His knees began to quake; and through the flare
Of vast effulgence darkness closed his eyes.
Now vainly he regrets he ever touched
His father's steeds, and he is stunned with grief
That so entreating he prevailed to know
His true descent. He rather would be called
The son of Merops. As a ship is tossed
By raging Boreas, when the conquered helm
Has been abandoned, and the pilot leaves
The vessel to his vows and to the Gods;
So, helpless, he is borne along the sky.

What can he? Much of heaven remains behind;
A longer distance is in front of him—
Each way is measured in his anxious mind.—
At first his gaze is fixed upon the west,
Which fate has destined he shall never reach,
And then his eyes turn backward to the east.—
So, stupefied and dazed he neither dares
To loose the bits, nor tighten on the reins,
And he is ignorant of the horses' names.

He sees horrific wonders scattered round,
And images of hideous animals.—
And there's a spot where Scorpion bends his claws
In double circles, and with tail and arms
On either side, stretches his limbs throughout
The space of two Celestial Signs; and when
The lad beheld him, steeped in oozing slime
Of venom, swart, and threatening to strike
Grim wounds with jagged spear-points, he was lost;
And, fixed in chills of horror, dropped the reins.

When these they felt upon their rising backs
The startled steeds sprang forthwith; and, unchecked,
Through atmospheres of regions unexplored,
Thence goaded by their unchecked violence,
Broke through the lawful bounds, and rushed upon
The high fixed stars. They dragged the chariot
Through devious ways, and soared amid the heights;
Dashed down deep pathways, far, precipitous,
And gained a level near the scorching earth.

Phœbe is wondering that her brother's steeds
Run lower than her own, and sees the smoke
Of scorching clouds. The highest altitudes
Are caught in flames, and as their moistures dry
They crack in chasms. The grass is blighted; trees
Are burnt up with their leaves; the ripe brown crops
Give fuel for self destruction— O, what small
Complaints! Great cities perish with their walls,
And peopled nations are consumed to dust—
The forests and the mountains are destroyed.

What mountains shall my startled
song describe
That withered in that furnace-blasting heat?—
The far famed Ida and her cooling rills
Are dry and burning, Helicon and Ætna
Wrapped in tremendous and redoubled flames;
And lo, the double-peaked Parnassus' slopes
And Rhodope have lost their snowy caps;
And Caucasus, and more than can be told;

But greater than them all, Olympüs burns;—
The lofty Alps, the cloud-topt Apennines.

And Phaeton, as he inhaled the air,
Burning and scorching as a furnace blast,
And saw destruction on the flaming world;
And his great chariot wreathed in quenchless fires,
Was suddenly unable to endure the heat,
The smoke and cinders, and he swooned away.—
If he had known the way, those winged steeds
Would rush as wild unguided.—

Then the skin
Of Ethiopians took a swarthy hue,
The hot blood tingling to the surface: then
The heat dried up the land of Libya;
Dishevelled, the lorn Nymphs, lamenting, sought
For all their emptied springs and lakes in vain;
Bœotia wailed for Dirce's cooling wave,
And Argos wailed for Amymone's stream.

Not safer from the flames were
distant streams;—

The mighty Babylonian Euphrates,
The rolling Ganges and the golden Tagus
Were melting in the flames. The swans
whose songs
Enhanced the beauties of Meonian banks
Were scalded in the Cayster's middle wave.
The Nile, affrighted, fled to parts remote,
And hid his head forever from the world,
And all his seven mouths were parched with heat:
The rivers Rhine and Rhone and Po and Tiber,
The ruler of the world, were choked with dust.

And even as the ground asunder burst,
The light amazed in gloomy Tartarus
The King Infernal and his Spouse. The sea
Contracted and his level waste became
A sandy desert. The huge mountain tops,
Once covered by the ocean's waves, reared up,

Gods and Heroes

By which the scattered Cyclades increased.
Even the fishes sought for deeper pools;—
The crooked dolphins dared not skip the waves;
The lifeless sea-calves floated on the top;
And it is even famed that Nereus hid
With Doris and her daughters, deep below
In seething caverns. With a dauntless mien
Thrice Neptune tried to thrust his arms above
The waters;—thrice the heated air o'ercame
His courage.

Then the genial Earth, although
Surrounded by the waters of the sea,
Was parched and dry; for all her streams had hid
Deep in the darkness of her winding caves.—
She lifted her productive countenance,
Up to her rounded neck, and held her palms
On her sad brows; and as the mountains huge
Trembled and tottered, beneath her wonted plane
Declined she for a space—and thus began,

With parched voice;

“If this is thy decree,
O, highest of the Gods,— if I have sinned
Why do thy lightnings linger? For if doomed
By fires consuming I to perish must,
Let me now die in thy celestial flames—
Hurled by thine arm— and thus alleviate,
By thine omnipotence, this agony.

“How difficult to open my parched mouth,
And speak these words! (the vapors choking her).
Behold my scorching hair, and see the clouds
Of ashes falling on my blinded eyes,
And o’er my features! What a recompense
For my fertility! How often I
Have suffered from the wounds of crooked plows
And rending harrows —tortured year by year!
For this I give to cattle juicy leaves
And fruits to man and frankincense to thee!

“Suppose destruction is my just award,
What have the waters and my brother done?
Why should my brother’s cooling waves decrease
And thus recede so distant from the skies?
If not thy brother’s good nor mine may touch
Thy mercy, let the pity of thy Heaven,
For lo, the smoking poles on either side
Attest, if flames consume them or destroy,
The ruin of thy palace. Atlas, huge,
With restive shoulders hardly can support
The burning axle. If the seas and lands
Together perish and thy palace fall,
The universe confused will plunge once more
In ancient Chaos. Save it from this wreck—
If anything survives the fury of the flames.”

So made the tortured Earth an end
of speech;
And she was fain to hide her countenance
In caves that border on the nether night.

But now the Almighty Father, having called
To witness all the Gods of Heaven, and him
Who gave the car, that, else his power be shown,
Must perish all in dire confusion, high
He mounted to the altitude from which
He spreads the mantling clouds, and fulminates
His dreadful thunders and swift lightning-bolts
Terrific.— Clouds were none to cool the earth,
And the surrounding skies were void of rain.—

Jove, having reached that summit,
 stood and poised
In his almighty hand a flashing dart,
And, hurling it, deprived of life and seat
The youthful charioteer, and struck with fire
The raging flames— and by the same great force
Those flames enveloping the earth were quenched
And he who caused their fury lost his life.

Frantic in their affright the horses sprang
Across the bounded way and cast their yokes,

And through the tangled harness lightly leaped.
And here the scattered harness lay, and there
The shattered axle, wrenched from off the pole,
And various portions of the broken car,
And spokes of the broken Wheel were
scattered round.

And far fell Phaeton with flaming hair;
As haply from the summer sky appears
A falling star, although it never drops
To startled earth.— Far distant from his home
The deep Eridanus received the lad
And bathed his foaming face. His body charred
By triple flames Hesperian Naiads bore,
Still smoking, to a tomb, and this engraved
Upon the stone; “Here Phaeton’s remains
Lie buried. He who drave his father’s car
And fell, although he made a great attempt.”

Filled with consuming woe, his father hid

His countenance which grief had overcast.
And now, surpassing our belief, they say
A day passed over with no glowing sun;—
But light-affording flames appeared to change
Disaster to the cause of good.

Amazed,
The woful Clymene, when she had moaned
In grief, amid her lamentations tore
Her bosom, as across the world she roamed,
At first to seek his lifeless corpse, and then
His bones. She wandered to that distant land
And found at last his bones ensepulchred.
There, clinging to the grave she fell and bathed
With many tears his name on marble carved,
And with her bosom warmed the freezing stone.

And all the daughters of the Sun went there
Giving their tears, alas a useless gift;—
They wept and beat their breasts, and day

and night
Called, "Phaeton," alas, who heard no sound
Of their complaint:—and there they lay
foredone,
All scattered round the tomb.

The silent moon
Had four times joined her horns
and filled her disk,
While they, according to an ancient rite,
Made lamentation. Prone upon the ground,
The eldest, Phaethusa, would arise,
But found, alas, her feet were growing stiff;
And uttered moan. Lampetia wished to aid
Her sister but was hindered by new roots;
A third when she would tear her hair,
plucked forth
But leaves: another wailed to find her legs
Were fastened in a tree; another moaned
To find her arms were changed to branches long.

And while they wondered, bark enclosed
 their thighs,
And covered their smooth bellies, and their
 breasts,
And shoulders and their hands, but left untouched
Their lips that called upon their mother's name.
What can she do for them? Hither she runs
And thither runs, wherever frenzy leads.
She kisses them, alas, while yet she may!

But not content with this, she tried to hale
Their bodies from the trees; and she would tear
The tender branches with her hands, but lo!
The blood oozed out as from a bleeding wound;
And as she wounded them they shrieked aloud
"Spare me! O mother spare me; in the tree
My flesh is torn! farewell! farewell! farewell!"
And as they spake the bark spread o'er their lips.

Their tears flow forth, and from the new-
 formed boughs

Amber distils and slowly hardens in the sun;
And far from there upon the waves is borne
To deck the Latin women.

Cygnus, son
Of Sthenelus, by his maternal house
Akin to Phaeton, and thrice by love
Allied, beheld this wonderful event.—
He left his kingdom of Liguria,
And all its peopled cities, to lament
Where the sad sisters had increased the woods
Beside the green banks of Eridanus.

There, as he made complaint, his manly voice
Began to pipe a treble, shrill; and long
Gray plumes concealed his hair. A slender neck
Extended from his breast, and reddening toes
Were joined together by a membrane. Wings
Grew from his sides, and from his mouth
was made

Phaeton and Phoebus

A blunted beak. Now Cynus is a swan,
And yet he fears to trust the skies and Jove,
For he remembers fire, unjustly sent,
And therefore shuns the heat that he abhors,
And haunts the spacious lakes and pools
and streams
That quench the fires.

In squalid garb, meanwhile,
And destitute of all his rays, the sire
Of Phaeton, as dark as when eclipse bedims
His Wheel, abhors himself and hates the light,
Shuns the bright day, gives up his mind to grief,
Adds passion to his woe, denies the earth
His countenance, and thus laments; "My lot
Was ever restless from the dawn of time,
And I am weary of this labor, void
And endless. Therefore, let who will urge forth
My car, light-bearing, and if none may dare,
When all the Gods of Heaven acknowledge it,

Let Jove himself essay the task. Perchance,
When he takes up the reins, he may forget
His dreadful lightning that bereaves of child
A father's love; and as he tries the strength
Of those flame-footed steeds will know, in truth,
The lad who failed to guide my chariot
Deserved not death."

But all the Deities
Encircle Phoebus as he makes complaint,
And with their supplications they entreat
Him not to plunge the world in darkness. Jove
Would find excuses for the lightning-bolt,
Hurled from his hand, and adds imperious threats
To his entreaties. Phoebus calls his steeds,
Frenzied with their maddening fires, and breaks
Their fury, as he vents with stinging lash
His rage upon them, and in passion lays
On them the death of Phaeton his son.

IO and ARGUS

Io and Argus

Lo! Jupiter transformed the beautiful
Maid Io, to a heifer, and to please
His angry Queen, imperious Juno, gave
To her the hapless maiden in that state.
But Juno fearful of the arts of Jove,
Lest he might change her to her human form,
Gave the unhappy heifer to the charge
Of Argus, Aristorides, whose head
Was circled with a hundred glowing eyes;
Of which but two did slumber in their turn
Whilst all the others kept on watch and guard.

Whichever way he stood his gaze was fixed
On Io — even if he turned away
His watchful eyes on Io still remained.
He let her feed by day; but when the sun
Was under the deep world he shut her up,
And bound her undeserving neck with chains.

She eats arbutus leaves and bitter herbs,
And sleeps upon the ground, too often bare,
And never lies upon a restful couch.—
She drinks the troubled waters. Hoping aid
She tries to stretch imploring arms to Argus,—
But all in vain, for now no arms remain;
And when she wishes to complain the sound
Of bellowing is all her mouth sends forth;
And she is frightened with her proper voice.

Where former days she loved to roam
and sport,
She wandered by the banks of Inachus:

There imaged in the stream she saw her horns,
And, startled, turned and fled. And Inachus
And all her sister Naiads knew her not;
Although she followed them they knew her not;—
Although she suffered them to touch her sides
And praise her.

When the ancient Inachus
Gathered sweet herbs and offered them to her,
She licked his hands, kissing her father's palms,
Nor could she more restrain her falling tears.—
If only words would flow as well as tears,
She might implore his aid and tell her name
And all her sad misfortunes; but, instead,
She traced in sand the letters of her name
With cloven hoof; and thus her sad estate
Was known.

“Ah wretched me!” her father cried;
And as he clung around her horns and neck

Repeated, while she groaned, "Ah wretched me!
Art thou my daughter sought in every clime?
When lost I could not grieve for thee as now
That thou art mute; thy sighs instead of words
Heave up from thy deep breast; thy lowings give
Me answer. I prepared the nuptial torch
And bridal chamber, in my ignorance,
Since my first hope was for a son-in-law,
And then I dreamed of children from the match:
But now the herd must furnish thee a mate,
And surely of the herd must be thy son.—
O that a righteous death would end my grief!—
It is an evil thing to be a God!
Behold the lethal gate of death is shut
Against us, and our growing grief extends
Through all eternity."

While thus he moaned
Came starry Argus there, and Io bore
From her lamenting father. Thence he led

His charge to other pastures; and, removed
From her, attained a lofty mountain top,
Whence, sitting, he could watch her undisturbed.

The Sovereign God no longer could endure
To witness Io's woes. He called his son,
Whom Maia, brightest of the Pleiades,
Brought forth, and bade him slay the star-eyed
guard,
Argus. He seized his sleep-compelling wand,
And bound his swift wings on his feet, and fixed
His cap upon his head, with nimble deft:—
So Mercury, the favored son of Jove,
Descended to the earth from heaven's plains;
Put off his cap and wings,— though still retained
His wand with which he drave through pathless
wilds
Some stray she-goats; and as a shepherd fared,
Piping on oaten reeds melodious tunes.

Argus, delighted with the charming sound

Of this new art, began; ‘‘Whoe’er thou art,
Sit with me on this stone, beneath the trees
In cooling shade, whilst browse the tended flock
Abundant herbs; for thou canst see the shade
Is fit for shepherds.’’ Wherefore, Mercury
Sat down beside the keeper and conversed
Of various things—passing the laggard hours.—

Then soothly piped he on the joined reeds
To lull those ever-watchful eyes asleep;
But Argus strove his languor to o’ercome,
And though some drowsy eyes might slumber,
still,
Were some that vigil kept. Again he spake,
(For that the pipes were yet a recent art)
‘‘I pray thee tell what chance discovered these.’’

To him the God, ‘‘A famous Naiad dwelt
Among the Hamadryads, on the cold
Arcadian summit Nonacris, whose name

Was Syrinx. Often she escaped the Gods,
That wandered in the groves or sylvan shades,
And often fled from Satyrs that pursued. —
Vowing virginity, in all pursuits
She strove to emulate Diana's grace:
And as the Ortygian Goddess wears her robe,
So Syrinx girded hers that one might well
Believe Diana there. Even though her bow
Were made of horn, Diana's wrought of gold,
Yet might she well deceive.

“Now chanced it Pan,
Whose head was girt with prickly pines, espied
The Nymph returning from the Lycian Hill,
And these words uttered he:”— But Mercury
Refrained from further speech, and Pan's appeal
Remains untold. If he had told it all,
The tale of Syrinx would have followed thus;—

But she despised the prayers of Pan,

and fled

Through pathless wilds until she had arrived
The placid Ladon's sandy stream, whose waves
Prevented her escape. There she implored
Her sister Nymphs to change her form: and

Pan,

Believing he had caught her, held instead
Some marsh-reeds for the body of the Nymph;
And whilst he sighed the moving winds began
To utter plaintive music in the reeds,
So sweet and voice-like that poor Pan exclaimed;
"Forever this discovery shall remain
A sweet communion binding thee to me"—
And this explains why reeds of different length,
When joined together by cementing wax,
Derive the name of Syrx from the maid.

Such words Cyllenian Mercury would say;
But now, perceiving Argus' eyes were dimmed
In languorous, doze he hushed his voice,

and touched

The drooping eyelids with his magic wand,
Compelling slumber. Then without delay
He struck the sleeper with his crooked sword,
Where neck and head unite, and stained
with gore
Down-hurled him headlong o'er the craggy cliff.

Low lies Argus: dark is the light of all
His hundred eyes, his many-orbed light
Extinguished in the universal gloom
That night surrounds; but Saturn's daughter
spread
Their glister on the feathers of her bird,
Emblazoning its tail with starry gems.

Juno made haste, inflamed with towering
rage,
To vent her wrath on Io; and she raised
In thought and vision of the grecian girl
The dreadful Furies. Stings invisible,

And pitiless, she planted in her breast,
And drave her wandering throughout the globe.
The utmost limit of her labored way,
O Nile, thou didst remain.— Which, having
reached.

And placed her tired knees on the river's edge,
She laid her there, and as she raised her neck
Looked upward to the stars, and groaned and
wept,

And mournfully bellowed: trying thus to pray,
By all the means she had, that Jupiter
Might end her miseries. Repentant Jove
Embraced his consort, and entreated her
To end the punishment: “Fear not,” he said,
“For she shall trouble thee no more.” He spake
And bade the Stygian Lake record his vow.

And now imperial Juno, pacified,
Permitted Io to resume her form.—
At once the hair fell from her snowy sides;

Her horns decreased, her dilate orbs were
changed:

The opening of her jaws contracted; hands
Appeared and shoulders; and her transformed
hoofs

Became five nails. And every mark or form
That gave the semblance of a heifer changed,
Except her fair white skin. And the glad Nymph
Was raised erect, and stood upon her feet.—
But long the very thought of speech, that she
Might bellow as a heifer, filled her mind
With terror, till the words so long forgot
For some sufficient cause were tried once more.

AGLAUROS and MERCURY

Aglaurus and Mercury

Behold the bright Caduceus-Bearer soared,
On balanced wings, high in the dome of Heaven;
And far below him through a fruitful grove,
Devoted to Minerva's hallowed reign,
Some virgins bearing on their lovely heads,
In wicker baskets wreathed and decked with
 flowers,
Their sacred offerings to the citadel
Of that chaste Goddess. And the winged God,
While circling in the clear unbounded skies,
Beheld that train of virgins, beautiful,
As they were thence returning on their way.

Not forward on a level line he flew,
But wheeled in circles round. Lo, the swift kite
Swoops round the smoking entrails, while the
priests
Enclose in guarded ranks their sacrifice.
Wary with fear, that swiftest of all birds,
Dares not to venture from his vantage hight,
But greedily hovers on his waving wings
Around his keen desire. So, the bright God
Circled those towers, Actæan, round and round,
In mazy circles, greedy as the bird.

As much as Lucifer outshines the stars
That emulate the glory of his rays,
As greatly as bright Phœbe pales thy light,
O, lustrous Lucifer! so far surpassed
In beauty the fair maiden Herse all
Those lovely virgins of that sacred train,
Departing joyous from Minerva's grove.

The Son of Jove, astonished, while he

wheeled

On balanced pinions through the yielding air,
Burned hot; as oft from Balearic sling
The leaden missile, hurled with sudden force,
Burns in a glowing heat beneath the clouds.

Then sloped the God his course from airy
hight,

And turned a different way; another way
He went without disguise, in confidence
Of his celestial grace. But though he knew
His face was beautiful, he combed his hair,
And fixed his flowing raiment, that the fringe
Of radiant gold appeared. And in his hand
He waved his long smooth wand, with which
he gives

The wakeful sleep or waketh lidded eyes.
He proudly glanced upon his twinkling feet
That sparkled with their scintillating wings.

In a secluded part of that great fane,

Devoted to Minerva's hallowed rites,
Three chambers were adorned with tortoise
shell

And ivory and precious woods inlaid;
And there, devoted to Minerva's praise,
Three well known sisters dwelt. Upon the right
Dwelt Pandrosos and over on the left
Aglauros dwelt, and Herse occupied
The room between those two.

When Mercury
Drew near to them, Aglauros first espied
The God, and ventured to enquire his name,
And wherefore he was come. Then gracious spake
To her in answer the bright son of Jove;

“Behold the God who carries through the air
The mandates of almighty Jupiter!
But I come hither not to waste my time
In idle words, but only to beseech

Aglauros and Mercury

Thy kindness and good aid, that I may win
The love of thy devoted sister Her se.”

Aglauros, on the son of Jupiter,
Gazed with those eyes that only lately viewed
The guarded secret of the yellow-haired
Minerva, and demanded as her price
Gold of great weight; and ere he paid denied
Admittance of the house.

Minerva turned,
With orbs of stern displeasure, towards the maid
Aglauros; and her bosom heaved with sighs
So deeply labored that her Ægis-shield
Was shaken on her valiant breast. For she
Remembered when Aglauros gave to view
Her charge, with impious hand, that monster
form

Without a mother, maugre Nature’s law,
What time the God who dwells on Lemnos
loved.—

Gods and Heroes

Now to requite the God and sister; her
To punish whose demand of gold was great;
Minerva to the Cave of Envy sped.—
Dark, hideous with black gore, her dread abode
Is hidden in the deepest hollowed cave,
In utmost limits where the genial sun
May never shine, and where the breathing winds
May never venture; dismal, bitter cold,
Untempered by the warmth of welcome fires,
Involved forever in abounding gloom.

When the fair champion came to this abode
She stood before its entrance, for she deemed
It not a lawful thing to enter there:
And she whose arm is mortal to her foes,
Struck the black door-posts with her pointed
spear,
And shook them to the center. Straight the
doors
Flew open, and, behold, within was Envy

Ravening the flesh of vipers, self-begot,
The nutriment of her depraved desires.—

When the great Goddess met her evil gaze
She turned her eyes away. But Envy slow,
With sluggish languor, from the ground uprose
And left the scattered serpents half-devoured;
Then moving with a sullen pace approached.—
And when she saw the gracious Goddess, girt
With beauty and resplendant in her arms,
She groaned aloud and fetched up heavy sighs.

Her face is pale, her body long and lean,
Her shifting eyes glance to the left and right,
Her snaggle teeth are covered with black rust,
Her hanging paps o'erflow with bitter gall,
Her slavered tongue drips venom to the ground;
Busy in schemes and watchful in dark snares
Sweet sleep is banished from her blood-shot eyes;
Her smiles are only seen when others weep;
With sorrow she observes the fortunate,

And pines away as she beholds their joy;
Her own existence is her punishment,
And while tormenting she torments herself.

Although Minerva held her in deep scorn
She thus commanded her with winged words;
“Instil thy poison in Aglauros, child
Of Cecrops; I command thee; do my will.”

She spake; and spurning with her spear
the ground
Departed; and the sad and furtive-eyed
Envy beheld her in her glorious flight:
She murmured at the Goddess, great in arms:
But waiting not she took in hand her staff,
Which bands of thorns encircled as a wreath,
And veiled in midnight clouds departed thence.
She blasted on her way the ripening fields;
Scorched the green meadows, starred with
flowers,
And breathed a pestilence throughout the land

Aglauros and Mercury

And the great cities. When her eyes beheld
The glorious citadel of Athens, great
In art and wealth, abode of joyful peace,
She hardly could refrain from shedding tears,
That nothing might be witnessed worthy tears.

She sought the chamber where Aglauros
slept,
And hastened to obey the God's behest.
She touched the maiden's bosom with her hands,
Foul with corrupting stains, and pierced her
heart
With jagged thorns, and breathed upon her face
A noxious venom; and distilled through all
The marrow of her bones, and in her lungs,
A poison blacker than the ooze of pitch.

And lest the canker in her poisoned soul
Might spread unchecked throughout increasing
space,
She caused a vision of her sister's form

To rise before her, happy with the God
Who shone in his celestial beauty. All
Appeared more beautiful than in real life.—

When the most wretched daughter of Cecrops
Beheld the vision secret torment seized
On all her vitals; and she groaned aloud,
Tormented by her frenzy day and night.

A slow consumption wasted her away,
As ice is melted by the slant sunbeam,
When the cool clouds are flitting in the sky.
If she but thought of Hersè's happiness
She burned, as thorny bushes are consumed
With smoldering embers under steaming stems.
She could not bear to see her sister's joy,
And longed for death, an end of misery;
Or schemed to end the torture of her mind
By telling all she knew in shameful words,
Whispered to her austere and upright sire.

Aglauros and Mercury

But after many agonizing hours,
She sat before the threshold of their home
To intercept the God, who as he neared
Spake softly in smooth blandishment.
“Enough,” she said, “I will not move from
here
Until thou hast departed from my sight.”
“Let us adhere to that which was agreed.”
Rejoined the graceful-formed Cyllenian God,
Who as he spake thrust open with a touch
Of his compelling wand the carved door.

But when she made an effort to arise,
Her thighs felt heavy, rigid and benumbed;
And as she struggled to arise her knees
Were stiffened, and her nails turned pale and
cold;
Her veins grew pallid as the blood congealed.
And even as the dreaded cancer spreads
Through all the body, adding to its taint

The flesh uninjured; so, a deadly chill
Entered by slow degrees her breast, and stopped
Her breathing, and the passages of life.
She did not try to speak, but had she made
An effort to complain there was not left
A passage for her voice. Her neck was changed
To rigid stone, her countenance felt hard;
She sat a bloodless statue, but of stone
Not marble-white—her mind had stained it
black.

EUROPA and JUPITER

Europa and Jupiter

THE HOUSE of CADMUS

Jove laid aside his glorious dignity,
For he assumed the semblance of a bull
And mingled with the bullocks in the groves,—
His color white as virgin snow, untrod,
Unmelted by the watery Southern Wind.

His neck was thick with muscles, dewlaps hung
Between his shoulders, and his polished horns,
So small and beautifully set, appeared
The artifice of man; fashioned as fair

Gods and Heroes

And more transparent than a lucent gem.
His forehead was not lowered for attack,
Nor was there fury in his open eyes;
The love of peace was in his countenance.

When she beheld his beauty and mild eyes,
The daughter of Agenor was amazed;
But, daring not to touch him, stood apart
Until her virgin fears were quieted;
Then, near him, fragrant flowers in her hand
She offered, tempting, to his gentle mouth.

Jove then began to frisk upon the grass,
Or laid his snow-white side on the smooth sand,
Yellow and golden. As her courage grew
He gave his breast one moment for caress,
Or bent his head for garlands newly made,
Wreathed for his polished horns.

The royal maid,
Unwitting what she did, at length sat down

Upon the bull's broad back. Then by degrees
The God moved from the land and from the shore,
And placed his feet, that seemed but shining hoofs,
In shallow water by the sandy marge;
And not a moment resting bore her thence,
Across the surface of the Middle Sea
While she affrighted gazed upon the shore—
So fast receding. And she held his horns
With her right hand, and, steadied by the left,
Held on his ample back—and in the breeze
Her waving garments fluttered as they went—
And neither did the God reveal himself,
And lay aside the semblance of a bull,
Until they stood upon the plains of Crete.

CADMUS and the DRAGON

Cadmus and the Dragon

THE HOUSE of CADMUS

But not aware of this, her father bade
Her brother Cadmus search through all the world,
Until he found his sister, and proclaimed
Him doomed to exile if he found her not;—
Thus was he good and wicked by one deed.
When he had vainly wandered o'er the earth
(For who can fathom the deceits of Jove?)
Cadmus, the son of King Agenor, shunned
His country and his father's mighty wrath.

But he consulted the famed oracles
Of Phœbus, and enquired of them what land
Might offer him a refuge and a home.
And Phœbus answered him; "When on the plains
A heifer, that has never known the yoke,
Shall cross thy path go thou thy way with her,
And follow where she leads; and when she lies
To rest herself upon the meadow green
There shalt thou stop, as it will be a sign
For thee to build upon that plain the walls
Of a great city: and its name shall be
The City of Bœotia."

Cadmus turned;
But hardly had descended from the cave,
Castalian, ere he saw a heifer go
Unguarded, gentle-paced, without the scars
Of labor on her neck. He followed close
Upon her steps (and silently adored
Celestial Phœbus, author of his way)

Cadmus and the Dragon

Till o'er the channel that Cephissus wears
He forded to the fields of Panop e.—
There stood the slow-paced heifer, and she raised
Her forehead, broad with shapely horns, towards
Heaven;

And as she filled the air with lowing, stretched
Her side upon the tender grass, and turned
Her gaze on him who followed in her path.

Cadmus gave thanks and kissed the foreign soil,
And offered salutation to the fields
And unexplored hills. Then he prepared
To make large sacrifice to Jupiter,
And ordered slaves to seek the living springs
Whose waters in libation might be poured.

There was an ancient grove, whose branching
trees
Had never known the desecrating ax,
Where hidden in the undergrowth a cave,
With ozers bending round its low-formed arch,

Was hollowed in the jutting rocks—deep-found
In the dark center of that hallowed grove—
And 'neath its arched roof a beauteous stream
Of water welled serene. Its gloom concealed
A dragon, sacred to the war-like Mars;
Crested and gorgeous with radescent scales,
And eyes that sparkled as the glow of coals.
A deadly venom had puffed up his bulk,
And from his jaws he darted forth three tongues,
And in a triple row his sharp teeth stood.

Now those who traveled from the land of Tyre,
Ill-fated sons of Cadmus, took the path
That led them to this grove. There when they cast
Down-splashing in the crystal springs an urn,
The hidden dragon stretched his azure head
Out from the cavern's gloom, and vented forth
Teriffic hissings. Horrified they dropped
Their urns. A sudden trembling shook their knees;
And their life-blood was ice within their veins.

Cadmus and the Dragon

The dragon wreathed his scales in rolling knots,
And with a spring, entwisted in great folds,
Reared up his bulk beyond the middle rings,
High in the air from whence was given his gaze
The extreme confines of the grove below.
A size prodigious, his enormous bulk,
If seen extended where was naught to hide,
Would rival in its length the Serpent's folds,
Involved betwixt the planes of the Twin Bears.
The terrified Phœnicians, whether armed
For conflict, or in flight precipitate,
Or whether held incapable from fears,
He seized with sudden rage; stung them to death,
Or crushed them in the grasp of crushing folds,
Or blasted with the poison of his breath.

High in the Heavens the sun small shadow made
Ere Cadmus, wondering what detained his men,
Prepared to follow them. Clothed in a skin
Torn from a lion, he was armed, complete,

With lance of glittering steel; and with a dart:
But passing these he had a dauntless soul.

When he explored the grove and there beheld
The lifeless bodies, and above them stretched
The vast victorious dragon licking up
The blood that issued from their ghastly wounds;
His red tongue dripping gore; then Cadmus filled
With rage and grief; "Alas my faithful ones,
I will avenge your deaths or I will share it!"

He spake; and lifted up a mill-stone huge
With his right hand, and having poised it, hurled
With a tremendous effort dealing such
A blow would crush the strongest builded walls;
Yet neither did the dragon flinch the shock
Nor was he wounded, for his armour-scales,
Fixed in his hard and swarthy hide, repelled
The dreadful impact. Not the javelin thus,
So surely by his armoured skin was foiled,

Cadmus and the Dragon

For through the middle segment of his spine
The steel point pierced, and sank beneath the flesh,
Deep in his entrails. Writhing in great pain
He turned his head upon his bleeding back,
Twisting the shaft, with force prodigious shook
It back and forth, and wrenched it from the wound;
With difficulty wrenched it. But the steel
Remained securely fastened in his bones.
Such agony but made increase of rage:
His throat was swollen with great knotted veins;
A white froth gathered on his poisonous jaws;
The earth resounded with his rasping scales;
He breathed upon the grass a pestilence
Steaming mephitic from his Stygian mouth.

His body writhes up in tremendous gyres;
His folds, now straighter than a beam, untwist;
He rushes forward on his vengeful foe,
His great breast crushing the deep-rooted trees.

Small space gave Cadmus to the dragon's rage,

For by the lion's spoil he stood the shock,
And thrusting in his adversary's jaws
The trusted lance gave check his mad career.
Vain in his rage the dragon bit the steel
And fixed his teeth on the keen-biting point:
Out from his poisoned palate streams of gore
Spouted and stained the green with sanguine spray.
Yet slight the wound for he recoiled in time,
And drew his wounded body from the spear;
By shrinking from the sharp steel saved his throat
A mortal wound. But Cadmus as he pressed
The spear-point deeper in the serpent's throat,
Pursued him till an oak-tree barred the way;
To this he fixed the dragon through the neck:
The stout trunk bending with the monster's weight,
Groaned at the lashing of his serpent tail.

While the brave victor gazed upon the bulk
Enormous of his vanquished foe, a voice
Was heard—from whence was difficult to know,

Cadmus and the Dragon

But surely heard — “Son of Agenor, why
Art thou here standing by this carcass-worm,
For others shall behold thy body changed
Into a serpent?” Terrified, amazed,
He lost his color and his self-control;
His hair stood upright from the dreadful fright.

But lo, the hero's watchful Deity,
Minerva, from the upper realms of air
Appeared before him. She commanded him
To sow the Dragon's teeth in mellowed soil,
From which might spring another race of men.
And he obeyed: and as he plowed the land,
Took care to scatter in the furrowed soil
The dragon's teeth; a seed to raise up man.

'Tis marvellous but true, when this was done
The clods began to move. A spear-point first
Appeared above the furrows, followed next
By helmet-covered heads, nodding their cones,

Gods and Heroes

And shoulders, breasts and arms weighted with
spears;

And largely grew the shielded crop of men.—

So is it in the joyful theaters

When the gay curtains, rolling from the top,

Are drawn beneath until the stage is shown,—

It seems as if the actors rise to view:

First we behold their faces, then we see

Their bodies, and their forms by slow degrees

Appear before us on the open stage;

Cadmus, affrighted by this host, prepared
To arm for his defence; but one of those
From earth created cried; “Arm not! Away
From civil wars!” And with his trenchant sword
He smote an earth-born brother, hand to hand;
Even as the vanquished so the victor fell,
Pierced by a dart some distant brother hurled;
And likewise he who cast that dart was slain:
Both breathing forth their lives upon the air

Cadmus and the Dragon

So briefly theirs, expired together. All
As if demented leaped with sudden rage,
Each on the other, dealing mutual wounds.

So, having lived the space allotted them,
The youthful warriors perished as they smote
The earth (their blood-stained mother) with their
breasts:

And only five of all the troop remained;
Of whom Echion, by Minerva warned,
Called on his brothers to give up the fight,
And cast his arms away in pledge of faith.—
When Cadmus, exiled from Sidonia's gates,
Builded the city by Apollo named,
These five were trusted comrades in his toil.

ACTAEON

Actæon

THE HOUSE of CADMUS

Now Thebes is founded, who can deem thy days
Unhappy in thy exile, Cadmus? Thou,
The son-in-law of Mars and Venus; thou,
Whose glorious wife has born to thy embrace
Daughters and sons? And thy grandchildren join
Around thee, almost grown to man's estate.—
Nor should we say, "He leads a happy life,"
Till after death the funeral rites are paid.

Thy grandson, Cadmus, was the first to cast
Thy dear felicity in sorrow's gloom.
O, it was pitiful to witness him,
His horns outbranching from his forehead, chased
By dogs that panted for their master's blood!
If thou shouldst well inquire it will be shown
His sorrow was the crime of Fortune—not
His guilt—for who maintains mistakes are crimes?

Upon a mountain stained with slaughtered game,
The young Hyantian stood. Already day,
Increasing to meridian, made decrease
The flitting shadows, and the hot sun shone
Betwixt extremes in equal distance. Such
The hour, when speaking to his fellow friends,
The while they wandered by those lonely haunts,
Actæon of Hyantis kindly thus;

“Our nets and steel are stained with slaughtered
game,
The day has filled its complement of sport;

Now, when Aurora in her saffron car
Brings back the light of day, we may again
Repair to haunts of sport. Now Phœbus hangs
In middle sky, cleaving the fields with heat.—
Enough of toil; take down the knotted nets.”—
All did as he commanded; and they sought
Their needed rest.

There is a valley called
Gargaphia; sacred to Diana, dense
With pine trees and the pointed cypress, where,
Deep in the woods that fringed the valley's edge,
Was hollowed in frail sandstone and the soft
White pumice of the hills an arch, so true
It seemed the art of man; for Nature's touch
Ingenious had so fairly wrought the stone,
Making the entrance of a grotto cool.
Upon the right a limpid fountain ran,
And babbled, as its lucid channel spread
Into a clear pool edged with tender grass.

Here, when a-wearied with exciting sport,
The Sylvan Goddess loved to come and bathe
Her virgin beauty in the crystal lymph.

After Diana entered with her nymphs,
She gave her javelin, quiver and her bow
To one accustomed to the care of arms;
She gave her mantle to another nymph
Who stood near by her as she took it off;
Two others loosed the sandals from her feet;
But Crocale, the daughter of Ismenus,
More skillful than her sisters, gathered up
The Goddess' scattered tresses in a knot;—
Her own were loosely wantoned on the breeze.

Then in their ample urns dipt up the wave
And poured it forth, the cloud-nymph Nephelæ,
The nymph of crystal pools called Hyalæ,
The rain-drop Rhanis, Psecas of the dews,
And Phyalæ the guardian of their urns.
And whilst they bathed Diana in their streams,

Actæon, wandering through the unknown woods,
Entered the precincts of that sacred grove;
With steps uncertain wandered he as fate
Directed, for his sport must wait till morn.—
Soon as he entered where the clear springs welled
Or trickled from the grotto's walls, the nymphs,
Now ready for the bath, beheld the man,
Smote on their breasts, and made the woods resound,
Suddenly shrieking. Quickly gathered they
To shield Diana with their naked forms, but she
Stood head and shoulders taller than her guards.—
As clouds bright-tinted by the slanting sun,
Or purple-dyed Aurora, so appeared
Diana's countenance when she was seen.

O, how she wished her arrows were at hand!
But only having water, this she took
And dashed it on his manly countenance,
And sprinkled with the avenging stream his hair,
And said these words, presage of future woe;
“Go tell it, if thy tongue can tell the tale,

Thine eyes beheld me stripped of all my robes.”
No more she threatened, but she fixed the horns
Of a great stag firm on his sprinkled brows;
She lengthened out his neck; she made his ears
Sharp at the top; she changed his hands and feet;
Made long legs of his arms, and covered him
With dappled hair—his courage turned to fear.
The brave son of Autonoe took to flight,
And marveled that he sped so swiftly on.—

He saw his horns reflected in a stream
And would have said, “Ah, wretched me!” but now
He had no voice, and he could only groan:
Large tears ran trickling down his face, transformed
In every feature.—Yet, as clear remained
His understanding, and he wondered what
He should attempt to do: should he return
To his ancestral palace, or plunge deep
In vast vacuities of forest wilds?
Fear made him hesitate to trust the woods,
And shame deterred him from his homeward way.

While doubting thus his dogs espied him there:
First Blackfoot and the sharp nosed Tracer raised
The signal: Tracer of the Gnosian breed,
And Blackfoot of the Spartan: swift as wind
The others followed. Glutton, Quicksight, Surefoot,
Three dogs of Arcady; then valiant Killbuck,
Tempest, fierce Hunter, and the rapid Wingfoot;
Sharp-scented Chaser, and Woodranger wounded
So lately by a wild boar; savage Wildwood,
The wolf-begot with Shepherdess the cow-dog;
And ravenous Harpy followed by her twin whelps;
And thin-girt Ladon chosen from Sicynia;
Racer and Barker, brindled Spot and Tiger;
Sturdy old Stout and white haired Blanche and
 black Smut;
Lusty big Lacon, trusty Storm and Quickfoot;
Active young Wolfet and her Cyprian brother
Black headed Snap, blazed with a patch of white hair
From forehead to his muzzle; Swarthy Blackcoat
And shaggy Bristle, Towser and Wildtooth,
His sire of Dicte and his dam of Lacon;

And yelping Babbler: these, and others, more
Than patience leads us to recount or name.

All eager for their prey the pack surmount
Rocks, cliffs and crags, precipitous—where paths
Are steep, where roads are none. He flies by routes
So oft pursued but now, alas, his flight
Is from his own!—He would have cried, “Behold
Your master!— It is I—Actæon!” Words
Refused his will. The yelping pack pressed on.
First Blackmane seized and tore his master’s back,
Savage the next, then Rover’s teeth were clinched
Deep in his shoulder.—These, though tardy out,
Cut through a by-path and arriving first
Clung to their master till the pack came up.

The whole pack fastened on their master’s flesh
Till place was none for others. Groaning he
Made frightful sounds that not the human voice
Could utter nor the stag; and filled the hills
With dismal moans; and as a suppliant fell

Down to the ground upon his trembling knees;
And turned his stricken eyes on his own dogs,
Entreating them to spare him from their fangs.

But his companions, witless of his plight,
Urged on the swift pack with their hunting cries.
They sought Actæon and they vainly called,
‘Actæon! Hi! Actæon!’ just as though
He was away from them. Each time they called
He turned his head. And when they chided him,
Whose indolence denied the joys of sport,
How much he wished an indolent desire
Had haply held him from his ravenous pack.
O, how much better to behold the hunt,
And the fierce dogs, than feel their savage deeds!
They gathered round him, and they fixed their snouts
Deep in his flesh: tore him to pieces, he
Whose features only as a stag appeared.—
’Tis said Diana’s fury raged with none
Abatement till the torn flesh ceased to live.

SEMELE and JUPITER

Semele and Jupiter

THE HOUSE of CADMUS

Hapless Actæon's end in various ways
Was now regarded; some deplored his doom
But others praised Diana's chastity;
And all gave many reasons. But the spouse
Of Jove, alone remaining silent, gave
Nor praise nor blame. Whene'er calamity
Befell the race of Cadmus she rejoiced,
In secret, for she visited her rage
On all Europa's kindred.

Now a fresh
Occasion has been added to her grief,
And wild with jealousy of Semel e,
Her tongue as ever ready to her rage
Lets loose a torrent of abuse;

“Away!
Away with words! Why should I speak of it?
Let me attack her! Let me spoil that jade!
Am I not Juno the supreme of Heaven?
Queen of the flashing scepter? Am I not
Sister and wife of Jove omnipotent?
She even wishes to be known by him
A mother of a Deity, a joy
Almost denied to me! Great confidence
Has she in her great beauty—ne’er the less,
I shall so weave the web that even Jove
Will fail to save her.—Let the Gods deny
That I am Saturn’s daughter if her shade
Descends not stricken to the Stygian wave.”

She rose up quickly from her shining throne,
And hidden in a cloud of fiery hue
Descended to the home of Semel e;
And while encompassed by the cloud transformed
Her whole appearance as to counterfeit
Old Bero e, an Epidaurian nurse,
Who tended Semele.

Her tresses changed
To grey, her smooth skin wrinkled and her step
Grown feeble as she moved with trembling limbs;—
Her voice was quavering as an ancient dame's
As Juno, thus disguised, began to talk
To Semele. When presently the name
Of Jove was mentioned—artful Juno thus;

“When Jove appears to pledge his love to thee
Implore him to assume his majesty
And all his glory, even as he does
In presence of his stately Juno—Yea,
Implore him to caress thee as a God.”

With artful words as these the Goddess worked
Upon the trusting mind of Semele,
Daughter of Cadmus, till she begged of Jove
A boon, that only hastened her sad death;
For Jove not knowing her design replied,
“Whate’er thy wish, it shall not be denied,
And that thy heart shall suffer no distrust,
I pledge it by the Deity’s and waves
Of the deep Stygian Lake,—oath of the Gods.”
All overjoyed at her misfortune, proud
That she prevailed, and pleased that she secured
Of him a promise, that could only cause
Her own disaster, Semele addressed
Almighty Jove; “Come unto me in all
The splendor of thy glory as thy might
Is shown to Juno, Goddess of the skies.”
Fain would he stifle her disastrous tongue
But ere he knew her quest the words were said;
And, knowing that his greatest oath was pledged,
Sadly he mounted to the lofty skies,

Semele and Jupiter

And by his potent nod assembled there
The deep clouds: and the rain began to pour,
And thunder-bolts resounded.

But he strove
To mitigate his power, and armed him not
With flames o'erwhelming as had put to flight
His hundred-handed foe Typhœus—flames
Too dreadful. Other thunder-bolts he took,
Forged by the Cyclops of a milder heat,
With which insignia of his majesty,
Sad and reluctant, he appeared to her.—
Her mortal form could not endure the shock
And she was burned to ashes in his sight.

An unformed babe was rescued from her side,
And, nurtured in the thigh of Jupiter,
Completed Nature's time until his birth.
Ino, his aunt, in secret nursed the boy
And cradled him. And him Nyseian nymphs
Concealed in caves and fed with needful milk.

While these events according to the laws
Of destiny transpired, and while the child,
The twice-born Bacchus, in his cradle lay,
'Tis told that Jupiter, a careless hour,
Indulged too freely in the nectar cup;
And having laid aside all weighty cares,
Jested with Juno as she idled by.
Which, later ending in a hot dispute,
Unwilling to agree, at length they chose
Tiresias, umpire, to declare the truth,
Who gave decision in support of Jove.

From this the disappointment Juno felt
Surpassed all reason, and enraged, decreed
Eternal night should seal Tiresias' eyes.—
Immortal Deities may never turn
Decrees and deeds of other Gods to naught,
But Jove, to recompense his loss of sight,
Endowed him with the gift of prophecy.

NARCISSUS and ECHO

Narcissus and Echo

THE HOUSE of CADMUS

Tiresias' fame of phophecy was spread
Through all the cities of Aonia,
For his unerring answers unto all
Who listened to his words. And first of those
That hearkened to his fateful prophecies,
A lovely Nymph, named Liriopæ, came
With her sweet infant who was born to her
Upon the green marge of Cephissus' stream—
That mighty River-God whom she declared
The father of her boy.—

She questioned him,
Imploring him to tell her if her son,
Unequalled for his beauty, whom she called
Narcissus, might attain a ripe old age.
To which the blind seer answered in these words,
“A long life he may have, beneath the sun,
If he but fails to recognize himself,”—
So, frivolous the prophet’s words appeared;
And yet the event, the manner of his death,
The strange delusion of his frenzied love,
Confirmed it.

Three times five years soon were passed,
Another, also, and the lad might seem
A young man or a boy. And many a youth,
And many a damsel sought to gain his love;
But such his mood and spirit and his pride,
None gained his favor.

Once a noisy Nymph,

(Who ne'er could hold her tongue when others spoke,
Who never spoke till others had begun)
Mocking Echo, spied him as he drave,
In his delusive nets, some timid stags.—

For Echo was a Nymph, in olden time,—
And, more than vapid sound,—possessed a form:
And she was then deprived the use of speech,
Except to babble and repeat the words,
Once spoken, o'er and o'er.

Juno confused
Her silly tongue, because she oft detained
That glorious Goddess with her endless tales,
Till many a hapless Nymph, from Jove's embrace,
Had made escape adown the mountain. Oft,
For this, the Goddess might have caught them. Thus
The glorious Juno, when she knew her guile;

“Your tongue, so freely wagged at my expense,
Shall be of little use; Your endless voice,

Much shorter than your tongue." At once the Nymph
Was stricken as the Goddess had decreed;—
And, ever since, she only mocks the sounds
Of others' voices, or, perchance, returns
Their final words.

One day, when she observed
Narcissus wandering in the pathless woods
She loved him and she followed him, with soft
And stealthy tread.—The more she followed him
The hotter did she burn, as when the flame
Flares upward from the sulphur on the torch.

O, how she longed to make her passion known!
To plead in soft entreaty! to implore his love!
But now, till others have begun, a mute
Of Nature she must be. She cannot choose
But wait the moment when his voice may give
To her an answer.

Presently the youth,

By chance divided from his trusted friends,
Cries loudly, "Who is here?" and Echo, "Here!"
Replies. Amazed, he casts his eyes around,
And calls with louder voice, "Come here!"

"Come here!"

She calls the youth who calls.—He turns to see
Who calls him and, beholding naught exclaims,
"Avoid me not!" "Avoid me not!" returns.

He tries it o'er and o'er, and is deceived
By this alternate voice, and calls aloud;
"O let us come together!" Echo cries,
"O let us come together!" Never sound
Seemed sweeter to the Nymph, and from the woods
She hastened in accordance with her words,
And strove to wind her arms around his neck.
He flies from her and as he leaves her says,
"Take off thy hands! thou shalt not fold thy arms
Around me. Better death than such as thou
Shouldst e'er caress me!" Naught she answers save,
"Caress me!"

Thus rejected she lies hid
In the deep woods, hiding her blushing face
With the green leaves; and ever after lives
Concealed in lonely caverns in the hills.

But her great love increases with neglect;
Her miserable body wastes away,
Wakeful with sorrows; leanness shrivels up
Her skin, and all her lovely features melt,
As if dissolved upon the wafting winds—
Nothing remains except her bones and voice—
Her voice continues, in the wilderness;
Her bones have turned to stone. She lies concealed
In the wild woods, nor is she ever seen
On lonely mountain range; for, though we hear
Her calling o'er the hills, 'tis but a voice,
A voice that lives, that lives among the hills.

Thus he deceived the Nymph and many more,
Sprung from the mountains or the sparkling waves;
And thus he slighted many an amorous youth.—

Narcissus and Echo

And therefore, some one whom he once despised,
Lifting his hands to Heaven, implored the Gods,
"If he should love deny him what he loves!"
And as the prayer was uttered it was heard
By Nemesis who granted her assent.

NARCISSUS

Narcissus

There was a fountain silver-clear and
bright,
Which neither shepherds nor the wild she-goats,
That range the hills, nor any cattle e'er
Had touched— its waters were unsullied — birds
Disturbed it not; nor animals, nor boughs
That fall so often from the trees. Around
The grasses nourished by the stream grew; trees
That shaded from the sun let balmy airs
Temper its waters. Here Narcissus, tired

Of hunting and the heated noon, laid down,
Attracted by the peaceful solitudes
And by the glassy spring. There as he stooped
To quench his thirst another thirst increased.

While he is drinking he beholds himself
Reflected in the mirrored pool—and loves;
Loves an imagined body which contains
No substance, for he deems the mirrored shade
A thing of life to love. He cannot move,
For so he marvels at himself, and lies
With countenance unchanged, as if indeed
A statue carved of Parian marble. Long,
Supine upon the bank, his gaze is fixed
On his own eyes, twin stars; his fingers shaped
As Bacchus might desire, his flowing hair
As glorious as Apollo's, and his cheeks
Youthful and smooth; his ivory neck, his mouth
Dreaming in sweetness, his complexion fair
And blushing as the rose in snow-drift white.

All that is lovely in himself he loves,
And in his witless way he wants himself:—
He who approves is equally approved;
He seeks, is sought, he burns and he is burnt.

How oft he kisses the deceitful fount;
How oft he thrusts his arms to catch the neck
That's pictured in the middle of the stream:
Yet never may he wreath his arms around
That image of himself. He knows not what
He there beholds, but what he sees inflames
His longing, and the error that deceives
Allures his eyes. But why, O foolish boy,
So vainly catching at this flitting form?
The cheat that thou art seeking has no place.
Avert thy gaze and thou wilt lose thy love,
For this that holds thine eyes is nothing save
The image of thyself reflected back to thee.
It comes and waits with thee; it has no life;
It will depart if thou wilt only go.

Nor food nor rest can draw him thence—
outstretched

Upon the overshadowed green, his eyes
Fixed on the mirrored image ne'er may know
Their longings satisfied, and by their sight
He is himself undone. Raising himself
A moment, he extends his arms around,
And, beckoning to the murmuring forest; "Oh,
Ye aisled woods was ever man in love
More fatally than I? Your silent paths
Have sheltered many a one whose love was told,
And ye have heard their voices. Ages vast
Have rolled away since your forgotten birth,
But who is he through all those weary years
That ever pined away as I? Alas,
This fatal image wins my love as I
Behold it. But I cannot press my arms
Around the form I see. the form that gives
Me joy. What strange mistake has intervened
Betwixt us and our love? It grieves me more

That neither lands nor seas nor mountains, no,
Nor walls with closed gates deny our loves,
But only a little water keeps us far
Asunder. Surely he desires my love
And my embraces, for as oft I strive
To kiss him, bending to the limpid stream
My lips, so often does he hold his face
Fondly to me, and vainly struggles up.
It seems that I could touch him. 'Tis a strange
Delusion that is keeping us apart.

“Who'er thou art, Come up! Deceive
me not!

O, whither when I fain pursue art thou?
Ah, surely I am young and fair, the Nymphs
Have loved me. Ah, when I behold thy smiles
I cannot tell thee what sweet hopes arise.
When I extend my loving arms to thee
Thine also are extended me— thy smiles
Return my own. When I was weeping I

Have seen thy tears, and every sign I make
Thou dost return; and oft thy beauteous lips
Have seemed to move that peradventure words,
Which I have never heard, thou hast returned.

“No more my shade deceives me, I perceive
'Tis I in thee— I love myself— the flame
Arises in my breast and burns my heart—
What shall I do? Shall I at once implore?
Or should I linger till my love is sought?
What is it I implore? The thing that I
Desire is mine— abundance makes me poor.
Oh, I am tortured by a strange desire
Unknown to me before, for I would fain
Put off this mortal form; which only means
I wish the object of my love away.
Grief saps my strength, the sands of life are
run,
And in my early youth am I cut off;
But death is not my bane— it ends my woe.—

Narcissus

I would not death for this that is my love,
As two united in a single soul
Would die as one."

He spake; and crazed with love,
Returned to view the same face in the pool;
And as he grieved his tears disturbed the stream,
And ripples o'er the surface, glassy clear,
Defaced his mirrored form. And thus the youth,
When he beheld that lovely shadow go;
"Ah whither dost thou fly? O, I entreat
Thee leave me not. Alas, thou cruel boy
Thus to forsake thy lover. Stay with me
That I may see thy lovely form, for though
I may not touch thee I shall feed my eyes
And soothe my wretched pains." And while

he spake

He rent his garment from the upper edge,
And beating on his naked breast, all white
As marble, every stroke produced a tint

Gods and Heroes

As lovely as the apple streaked with red,
Or as the glowing grape when purple bloom
Touches the ripening clusters.

When as glass
Again the rippling waters smoothed, and when
Such beauty in the stream the youth beheld
No more could he endure. As in the flame
The yellow wax, or as the hoar frost melts
In early morning 'neath the genial sun;
So did he pine away, by love consumed,
And slowly wasted by a hidden flame.
No vermeil bloom now mingled in the white
Of his complexion fair; no strength has he,
No vigor, nor the comeliness that wrought
For love so long: alas, that handsome form
By Echo fondly loved may please no more.

But when she saw him in his hapless plight,
Though angry at his scorn, she only grieved.
As often as the love-lorn boy complained,

Narcissus

“Alas!” “Alas!” her echoing voice returned;
And as he struck his hands against his arms,
She ever answered with her echoing sounds.
And as he gazed upon the mirrored pool
He said at last, “Ah, youth beloved in vain!”
“In vain, in vain!” the spot returned his words;
And when he breathed a sad “farewell!”

“Farewell!”

Sighed Echo too. He laid his wearied head,
And rested on the verdant grass; and those
Bright eyes, which oft had loved to gaze,
entranced,
On their own master’s beauty, sad Night
closed.

And now although among the nether shades
His sad sprite roams, he ever loves to gaze
On his reflection in the Stygian wave.

His Naiad sisters mourned, and having
clipped

Their shining tresses laid them o'er his corpse:
And all the Dryads mourned: and Echo made
Lament anew. And these would fain upraise
His funeral pyre, and wave the flaming torch,
And make his bier; but as they turned their eyes
Where he had been, behold he was not there!
And in his body's place a sweet flower grew,
Golden and white, the white around the gold.

Legends and Sonnets

By

J. Brookes More

—To—

My Dear Wife

Margaret

A CONVENT LEGEND

A Convent Legend

Sheltered by massive cloister walls,
 (Where holy men abide)
While deeply fell December snows
 On the steep mountain side,
This legend of a convent old
 We read one Christmas tide.—

'Tis Christmas Eve, and all is still,
 And darker it is growing—
Far from the north on icy wing,
 A bitter wind is blowing—
A colder night was never known,
 Cold, bitter cold, and snowing.

Forth from her cell a pale nun fares,
From cell to chapel door,
And as she goes through drifting snows,
Her beads she telleth o'er;
She tells her beads a hundred times—
A hundred times and more.

She stands before the chapel door,
So faint and numb with cold,
She trembles as the frosted leaves,
When the year is turning old;
But there she waiteth in the snow
Until her beads are told.

She tries to enter—"Mary save!"
The chapel door is fast,
A massive door, and she so weak
From days of penance past—
Ah, surely she must perish there!—
But now the wintry blast,

A Convent Legend

Blowing so cold o'er hill and wold,
 (A bitter Christmas tide!)
As if it heard the holy word,
 When she to Mary cried,
Struck on the door with sudden strength
 And pushed it open wide.

And as the massive door gave way,
 ('Tis told by good monks old)
The picture of a blessed saint
 Fell on the pavement cold;
And where 'twas framed a window flamed
 In amethyst and gold.

And through this window streamed the moon,
 Resplendent as a queen,
Together with a glorious star,
 The flitting clouds between,
And lit the aisle with mingled rays
 Of gold and purple sheen.

Sonnets and Legends

The simple chapel, in that light,
So strange and holy seemed
That when the pale nun paced the aisle
She surely thought she dreamed:
She thought a band of angels stood
Where the golden splendor streamed.

At length she knelt before the cross,
(A holy place to kneel)
And as she gazed in silent thought,
And prayed for sinners' weal,
A vision of the unseen world,
Blest spirits, seeming real,

Swept in a maze before her gaze,
And Jesus Christ was there.
And while she knelt, in wonder wrapt,
The vision, strangely fair,
In silence passed; but at the last
A cold mist filled the air.

A Convent Legend

Nor did it seem to be a dream;
 She heard the shrill winds blow;
They, as they blew, around her drew
 From wintry fields of snow;
Forming, she wist, a shape of mist,—
 Our dreaded mortal foe.

For as the cold winds gathered form
 That shape obscured her gaze,
Till even the altar and the cross
 Were vague as twilight haze:
And all so cold her chilled heart told
 'Twas he who ends our days.—

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But here a page, yellow with age,
So many, many years,
Was faded so we could not know
The story of her fears;
But o'er the leaf we might discern,
Though dimmed, perchance with tears,

That Jesus, Lord, (she loved so well,
To whom she ever prayed)
In that sad hour was always there,
For pity of the maid:
And when the darkness gathered round
He said, "Be not afraid."

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A Convent Legend

'Twas twelve o'clock, the convent bells
For Midnight Mass were ringing,
And all the nuns stood in the hall
A Christmas anthem singing,
And back and forth a novice turned,
The golden censor swinging.

And when the Abbess raised the cross
They marched out side by side:
Fair soldiers in a dream they seemed,
So softly did they glide
Across the yard and through the door
That still was open wide.

They saw the golden light that shone
Where hung the saint before,
And near the altar lay the nun,
Pale as the marble floor;
So pure and white, a holy sight
To bless and wonder o'er.

A Convent Legend

Her right hand crossed above the left,
A crucifix did hold;
Around her brows a halo wreathed
A crown of living gold;—
(Which some have thought the moonlight
wrought,—
The nuns have never told).

And all the sad nuns gathered round
The form they loved so well,
While mournful strains from unseen choirs
Softly rose and fell;
The saddest dirge that e'er was sung
To bid a soul farewell.

The grieving Abbess sadly said,
"Our sister Beatrice
Stands in the presence of her Lord,
Where tears and sorrow cease;
And let us pray, this Christmas day,
To Him who giveth peace."

SONNETS

I

In what dim antres of Forgetfulness
Are lingering the Gods of long ago,
Who, laughter-loving, mingled in the flow
Of mortal tears and human wretchedness?

Joyous they moved through avenues of distress,
And bathed the dark ways in a heavenly glow
Of light and reason, that the earth below
Might something of immortal hope possess.

No more among us, all their attributes are blent
In One Omnipotent, that dwelleth far
Beyond the knowledge of the finite mind:

And the sweet peace, that hallowed worship lent,
Is fast receding, as a fading star
Whose feeble virtue few may seek or find.

II

What pensive spirit poised on drooping wing,
Has ever ventured from his ghostly vale,
Through yielding ether and the moonlight pale,
That hither a true message he may bring?

No more the prophet's cries are quickening
The multitudes, and miracles now fail
To overcome the doubters that assail
The blessed altars where the faithful cling.

If then, our hallowed faith is but a dream,
And the world welters in a whirl of chance,
Why should we sorrow while endowed with
breath?

For, whether wise or merry, it would seem
The ways are tangled as an opiate's trance,—
Till the strange riddle has been solved by death.

III

Oh, for the tincture of an opiate-flower,
With triple virtue, and a dream profound
In a wide solitude where not a sound
May vex to motion a suspended hour:

Never to waken from the gentle power
Of living sleep, but like a dreamer drowned
In poppied slumber, to renew a round
Of visionary joys in Morpheus' bower!

By some smooth alchemy, unthought of yet,
To mingle in one essence life and death,
And float in ecstasy betwixt extremes!—

A vain delusion; what can void the debt
Our dust assumed, when vivified with breath
It pledged a long extinction for short dreams.

IV

All through the night the languid lily's bells
Sleep on the soft breeze, wafted in her glen,
But, quickened into new life, quiver when
The wakeful lark his happy matin swells

And when the rising sun lights crystal wells,
And that sweet flower leans o'er the stream, again
Adoring her Creator, is it in vain
That life is only where the Spirit dwells?

But, even as adoring worship fills
Her fragile being, from the town, near by,
An orphan finds and plucks—the lily's doom:

And torn from her cool glen amid the hills,
To deck the sorrow of a grave, and die,
She sighs her life away against the tomb.

Sonnets

V

Ever the round world turns a gladdened eye
To worship her material God that swings
In golden splendor, and a splendor flings,
Life-giving, from the universal sky.

And ever as the joyous moments fly,—
Ah, whither on their rapid sun-made wings,—
The changing world turns from her God and
brings
Darkness intense to hide her Deity.

And, lo, our changing souls may worship now,
Persuaded in a God of blessed sway,
Sufficient to the need, benign to save;

But on the morrow stifle every vow,
No more submissive to that faith, and say,
“The mystery of life turns to the grave.”

VI

When through the breaking clouds the rainbow's light
Makes glad the valley at the mountain's base,
The drooping flowers renew their pretty grace,
And lift their petals, fresh with raindrops bright.

And soon it seems as if a wizard's might
Is working wonders with the rainbow's rays,
Which disappearing leave nor sign nor trace,
Save tiny birds that balance in swift flight.

Out of the rainbow they appear to spring,
And dart with humming sound among the
flowers,
And flash their splendor till the day is done.

So, when a lovely soul unfolds her wing,
Ah, must she hover in celestial bowers,
Only to vanish in the vast unknown?

VII

Observe the wisdom of the winging bee,
That wanders in a labyrinth, ablaze
With healthful blooms of balmy summer days,
And garners stores against adversity.

She gives no credit to Philosophy,
Who feebly falters in his tangled maze
Of sounding words,—addressed divergent ways
To life or death, as either case may be.

For, though each morning—when the sun awakes
The drowsy world again to diligence,—
Brings her that closer to eternal night,

She fails not, as the moments go, but takes
Rich toll of life, her own life's recompense,
And gains fair balance—till her last long flight.

Sonnets and Legends

VIII

The bark sails for a moment and is tossed
By the rough winds into eternity;
And the mild autumn breezes presently
Must vanish for the winter's killing frost:

But like the brave sport who has staked and lost,
With only smiles for his adversity,
Let us play hazard on a changing sea,
And chance a wreck, no matter what the cost.

For brief the tally of our days ordained,
When we were ushered in this world of tears
By the slant twist of fickle Fortune's wheel:

And every action is a moment gained,
An added motion to the moving reel
That pictures life—as the dark ending nears.

IX

Oh, let us top our glasses with red wine
And drown in folly sober-vested Care;
Ho, all ye wise men! let us motley wear
And gaily habit with the surfeit swine:

For where goes wisdom, if we hew the line
And listen to her words that only bear
Us ever deeper in a deep despair,
Where not the feeblest ray of light may shine?

Crown only joyful clowns with classic bays,
And worship Folly in the world's wide fane;
Greet with light laughter either feast or crust:

Toils of a life-time for a puff of praise,
That flits tomorrow, is but labor vain—
The weak and strong dissolve in equal dust.

X

Poised as a rapier glittering in the sun,
The deadly dragon-fly awaits his prey;
But near him a frail rosebud gives the day
Largess of life that she has briefly won.

Surely the canker-moth that rose must shun,
For like an old-time knight, as reckless and gay,
The valiant dragon-fly disputes the way—
Our gentle rosebud's witless champion.

A few short hours may span his might in war,
And, silent on the velvet-matted moss,
Dissolves to dust the short-lived dragon-fly:

And the limp rose, now leaning sadly o'er
Her fallen hero, covers him with loss
Of her own petals,—fragrant while they die.

XI

O sacred forest of an age remote!

The little birds, that hover in thy trees,
Tune their unchanged immortal melodies
To Nature's voice that in thy realm doth float.

And even the speckled toad, ordained to dote
Upon the silent Moon, from squatting knees
Peers upward, out of boggy pools, and sees
Her guiding through the skies her silver boat.

Alas, each day the cruel hunter sights
His scientific tubes to slaughter all,—
That silence may succeed the sound of song:

But on the slippery toad his heel alights,
While hunting for his victims, and his
 luckless fall
Gives him to Death—that all may suffer wrong.

XII

Harsh blow the cold winds from the barren north,
Hurling battalions of sharp hail and sleet
Over the genial south,—to blast and beat
Frail blossoms that the fruitful soil brought
forth.

But all that turmoil gives an equal worth;
For cold death is a foil to living heat,
New life is nourished in death's winding sheet,
And from the dead,—life beautifies the earth.

Why, then, this wonder that a war-mad king
May hurl his legions to destroy dear life,
Dispensing in God's name unholy hate?

From all that winter-frost of hate may spring
A summer of sweet love to end all strife;
And hallowed peace may be our last estate.

AL ARAF to ALICON

Al Araf to Alicon

To the most glorious Haroun al Raschid,
Prince of the World and Leader of the Faithful,
greeting:—

As thy lowly servant journeyed through Arabia, it came to pass he broke bread with a holy Dervish, celebrated from Damascus to Aden, not only for his sanctity but also by reason of strange and pious visions, at times beheld after the extremities of fasting, and when the world slept.

And the most noteworthy vision of this holy man, O illustrious Sultan, was contained in a certain narrative that descended to him from the skies,—sweetly chanted in musical tones.—In

Sonnets and Legends

verse was the narrative, and more beautiful and noble than the songs of Firdusi.

Seventy stanzas were in the narrative; and the Dervish declares there is a mystery of perfection contained in the number seventy, it being ten times the perfect seven. And the seventy stanzas were each of three lines,— a mystical cabala that emanates from the throne of Allah; for, always will the Two Prophets stand at the right and left of the One Omnipotent,— three wills made manifest in one.

Behold, the sacred words that descended from the Seventh Heaven, as gentle as the dews of Mecca, are the history of a certain wise and mighty Chaldean, who crossed over the dismal abyss of unsaved spirits, which are neither condemned to the perdition of Gehenna nor saved to the joys of Heaven.— The Christians (let the dogs devour their bones) call a like place, in their idolatry, by the hideous name of Limbo, but the true believer calleth it Al Araf.

And after that Chaldean Magian had crossed the dark chasm on the glorious Al-Sirat, mysterious bridge whose span is as a sword's edge, and over which our souls must pass before they may

attain the delectable abode of those departed spirits, which have been received in Islam; then did Azrael, the frightful angel of death, dissipate his ultimate mortal essence, so that his ethereal spirit might move in a radiant region of the stars that, like a foot-stool to Allah Akbar, revolves below the splendor of Alicon.

And O dread Sultan! doth not the Holy Scroll aver; from Alicon, which is the Seventh Heaven (whence the living God looks down to earth), streams more golden than the River Altan Kol proceed? Al Koran, doth it not declare, "Rivers shall run at their feet."

O sacred words! and they were chanted by the Blessed Angel, Israfil—whose heart is like the lute—and, with many others, beautiful, were woven in a song of truth and hope and light.

And in that region the sacred wandering spirit, of that wise and rescued Chaldean, saw tinted lights, of which the holy Dervish discovers hidden meanings.

But, oh my most gracious lord! when I recite these verses to my favorite wife, Felicia

(thy gift of the captive Franks to me), that beautiful, but misguided, female maintains the thoughts are splendid in abominable idolatries of European Giaours — may evil Jinns destroy them!—

For that reason, Lord of the Faithful
I have sent these lines to thee, that in thy wisdom thou mayst have them purged of evil machinations.

And may thy benediction rest upon
Thy devoted servant
Osman.

Al Araf to Aliron

Over a wide and sullen stream,
Like the weird fancy of a dream,
Behold Al-Sirat's radiant gleam:

Al-Sirat, bridge of brightest glow,
Rising above the turbid flow
Of that mysterious stream below.

Curved as a jewelled scimitar,
Bright as the shaft of Isfendiar,
Its light pierced through the distance far.

I blest its genial beauty there,
For the bleak night was dark; and where
I stood was cold, and chill the air;

Sonnets and Legends

And vapors hovered o'er the tide,
And the dark current spread so wide
That none might see the other side.

But I conceived vales of delight,
Spreading beyond the gloomy night,
Led from that glowing rainbow bright.

And, in that phantasy of thought,
Hope a delusive splendor wrought,
And momentary comfort brought.

But I was on a treacherous ooze,
Al Araf's margin, dank with dew,—
A sadder place heart could not choose.

The bridge, though beautiful, seemed frail,
And I was sure its arch would fail
To bear me from that dismal vale.

No shallop light to save was there,
Nor any craft, with white sails fair,
To stem the tide on wings of air.

Fantastic phantoms would appear,
Which, though intangible, seemed near,
And filled me with a nameless fear:

Fear of disaster, a strange dread
That I might join the formless dead,
And haunt the void that round me spread.

Fearing such deep and desolate
Abyss as my unhallowed fate,
Backward I turned disconsolate.

Thus, turning, I beheld on high
A pale white phantom in the sky
That like a cloud sailed silently.

This way and that it sailed and whirled,
But never a filmy edge unfurled,
Nor was it lustrous, dew impearled.

It ever seemed a cloud, although
It left the sky with motion slow
Until it touched the vale below:

A phantom of unearthly white,
A nebula of rayless light,
Formless and blending in the night.

The frost of Azrael was beneath
Its silent wing, and its sharp breath
Was the black frost of utter death.

My very veins with ice were filled,
The well-spring of my life was chilled,
The beating of my heart was stilled

As doomed eternal, flesh and soul;—
Congealed as streams that never roll
From ice-chains of the nether Pole:

Not dead and not alive, I seemed
A statue in a nightmare dreamed,
A haunted void — fronting where gleamed

An arch of hope, resplendent thrown
From sad Al Araf (antres lone)
To dim shores of the vast unknown.—

So light spreads forth from the black sky;
So life is born from those that die;
And so from utmost alchemy

I felt anew sweet life pervade;
And the dark past began to fade—
(But still that arch and sad stream staid)—

Lightly I moved, as in a dream,
Across that wide and gloomy stream,
Over that bridge of rainbow gleam;

And soon upon the center stood
Of that great arch; and lo, the flood
Rolled red and sanguine — red as blood.

The light that made the bridge so sheen
Flashed on the river's depth, obscene,
Fantastic flames of gold and green;

And those strange lights, that mixed and blent,
All flashing a wild splendor lent
The sanguine tide which onward went.

Sonnets and Legends

And I observed its winding chasm
Flowed fast with many a weird phantasm,
Writhing in pain and tortuous spasm.

Like seething waves the sad shapes heaved;
Alas, it was, as I believed,
A stream of bodies interweaved.

But O, to see that lovely light,
From the high arch, gleam far and bright,
On upturned faces woful white!

And far away their tremulous sighs
Like mist above the waves would rise,
Slow-wafting to the leaden skies.

And from the deep waves many a groan,
Like sorrowing ghost from mortal flown,
Took shape and floated, sad and lone.

What wonder that I swiftly sped
Over that bridge — a rainbow spread
Across that River of the Dead—

Whilst all those ghostly sights, that made
My blood to chill, no longer staid
But in the distance soft did fade.

Thus, having left the Vale Despair,
With glad surprise, a region fair
I viewed with rapture. Wheresoe'er

My wildered steps were turned, it seemed
That I was in a region dreamed
With phantasies that round me streamed;

And all the woful sights that made
My blood so chill, and even staid
My pulse-beat, far away did fade:

For I had left the dismal tide,
And now was in a region wide
And radiant — where wonders vied

With every beauty to display
Sights more delightful. And alway
The breezes whispered, as in May.

Sonnets and Legends

Where e'er I wandered in that land
A river followed; and its strand
Was beautiful, of lucent sand,

As the bright waves of Altan Kol,
That over Asian ledges roll,
Speckled with gold from sandy shoal.

Glancing through meadow, field and wold,
Argentine, lined with yellow gold,
Edged with green banks and forests old.

And there were places where the trees,
Close by the brink, caught every breeze,
Or lapped the wave their thirst to appease.

And blue as Persian skies in May,
When rain has left a cloudless day,
Exotic champaks starred the way.

And everywhere the Sakhrat-sheen,
From skies to waters hyaline,
Dissolved in beauty o'er the scene.

O, it was beautiful to look
Upon — with many a shaded nook,
Where all around sweet light-beams strook.

Night came not there with deadly hush,
Nor chilling frost, nor loud wind's rush
The tender buds to beat and crush.

For there were two bright suns that shone
Together, and were never lone;
And the bleak night was all unknown.

One sun was purest blue and ne'er
Beamed in mid-sky, but circled where
The far tree-tops dissolved in air.

The other sailed with wondrous motion,
Backwards and forth across the ocean
Of lambent air, that no commotion

Or tempest ever tossed. Pure white
It shone, with large and steady light,
In skies that knew nor storm nor night.

Sonnets and Legends

And when their beams did intersect,
The lovely meads, so sweet bedecked,
With strangest lights and shades were checked.

Shadows that swerved from side to side,
To follow those twin suns, did glide
With motion slow across the wide

Translucent and deep-glowing sky—
And aye the shadows, silently
As winged Tacwins, flitted by.

The trees seemed ever budding with
New life, and every field and heath
Was glowing in life's generous breath.

To breathe the air gave hope and joy;
And there was nothing to annoy
Or grieve the heart, and naught to cloy.

And I could see no yellow leaves,
Nor branches bare, nor withered sheaves,
Nor aught that on the earth bereaves:

It was so different from aught
Of earth, or anything that thought
Could picture, or that dreams have wrought.

The concave golden sky was spread
With stars and meteors that shed
Soft beams of white and blue o'erhead.

These lights were wonderful and fair,
Most pleasant to the eye, and ne'er
Beamed like the noonday's blinding glare.

As lovely spirits in the sky,
Or splendid birds, they seemed to fly
Across the glowing dome on high.

And every star sent forth a clear
And perfect note, which to the ear
Was rapturous as a ringing sphere;

Or like the blessed angel's voice,
Bidding the heavenly choirs rejoice
In Him who is their love and choice,—

The blessed angel, Israfil,
On Alicon's engolden'd hill,
Heard by the saints when night is still—

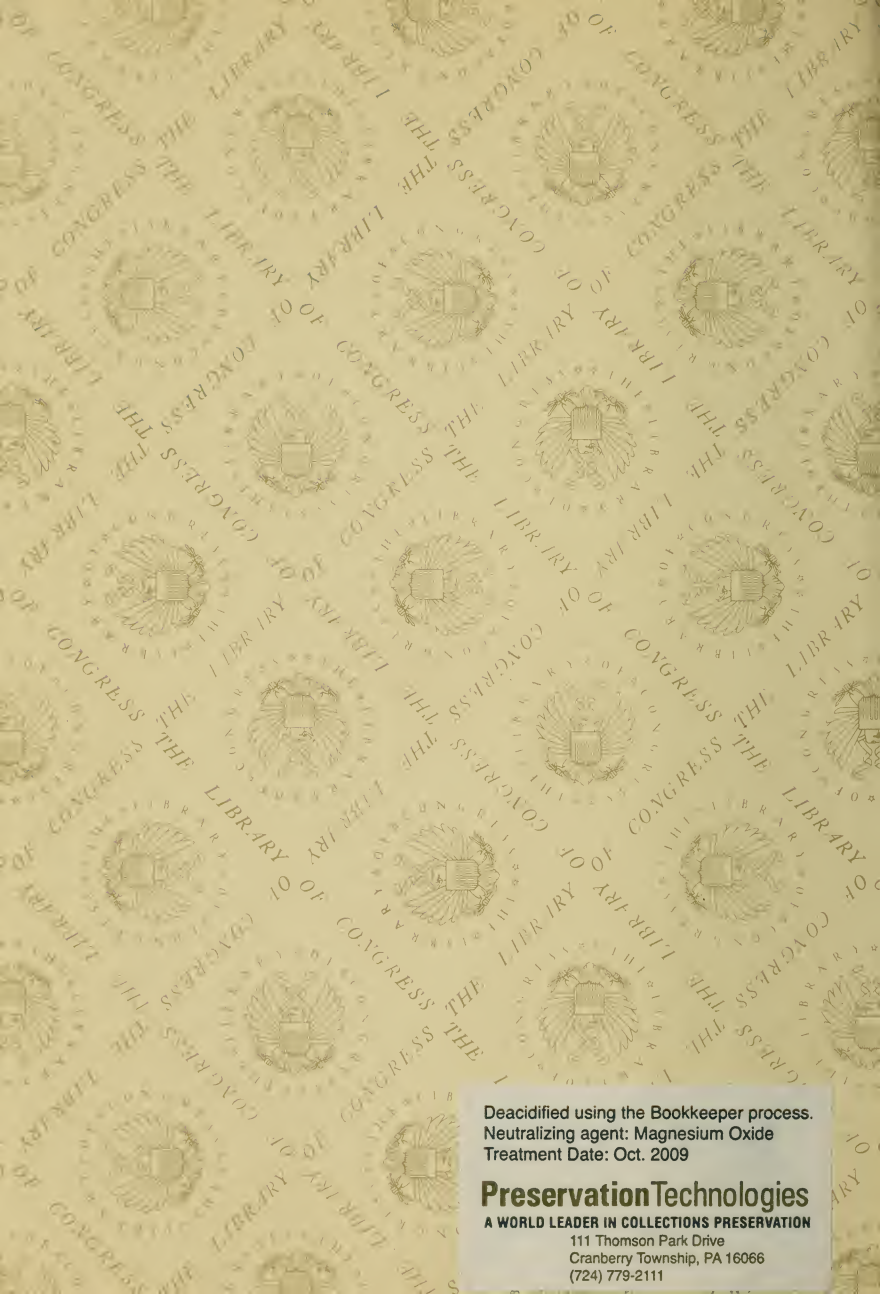
Ten thousand, thousand joyous notes,
Sweet as when through the forest floats
The silvery joys of feathered throats.

And those two suns, one blue, one white,
Seemed monarchs of that land of light,
For all the stars paled in their might;

And even I, in that sweet hour,
Acknowledged their most gentle power,
As did the blue and white star-shower.

And here am I, where Truth and Hope,
Benignant, beam from starry cope,
In knowledge sure Death's portals ope

To larger life, and not to sleep,
Amid world-stars that vigils keep
O'er sorrowing men who toil and weep.



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